the weekly Standard

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THE APPALLING V.S. NAIPAUL
JOSEPH BOTTUM

WIPEOUT

Fred Barnes • Jeffrey Bell
Peter Berkowitz • Matthew Continetti
Andrew Ferguson • Stephen F. Hayes
William Kristol • Matt Labash
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on the late, unlamented
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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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The Courtier Chronicles

It's been difficult, it really has, but The Scrapbook has read every last bit of triumphalist commentary on Barack Obama's election. The International Code of Punditry compels us. Some of the analysis, we are happy to report, has been sober and thought-provoking. And there's no doubt that the election of America's first black president is a historic milestone.

But most of the punditry has been—and we say this with as much understatement as we can muster—a bunch of bull. So we've been keeping a file of the over-the-top reactions to The One's ascendance. Here are some of the worst. Be prepared to gag.

"Some princes are born in palaces. Some are born in mangers. But a few are born in the imagination, out of scraps of history and hope. Barack Obama never talks about how people see him: I'm not the one making history, he said every chance he got. You are. Yet as he looked out Tuesday night through the bulletproof glass, in a park named for a Civil War general, he had to see the truth on people's faces. We are the ones we've been waiting for, he liked to say, but people were waiting for him, waiting for someone to finish what a King began. . . .

"Barack Hussein Obama did not win because of the color of his skin. Nor did he win in spite of it. He won because at a very dangerous moment in the life of a still young country, more people than have ever spoken before came together to try to save it. And that was a victory all its own."

—*Time* editor-at-large Nancy Gibbs in that magazine's November 17 issue.

"Yes, it is time to hope again.

"Time to hope that the era of racial backlash and wedge politics is over. Time to imagine that the patriotism of dissenters will no longer be questioned and that the world will no longer be divided between 'values voters' and those with no moral compass. Time to expect that an ideological label will no longer be enough to disqualify a politician.

"Above all, it is time to celebrate the country's wholehearted embrace of democracy, reflected in the intense engagement of Americans in this campaign and the outpouring to the polls all over the nation. For years, we have spoken of bringing free elections to the rest of the world even as we cynically mocked our own ways of conducting politics. Yesterday, we chose to practice what we have been preaching."

—*Washington Post* columnist E.J. Dionne Jr., November 5

"We will have a President who can think and feel and speak; we will have a grownup who will treat us like grownups. The Bush era is over. And the Clinton era. And the Reagan era. And the 1960s."

—*New Yorker* staff writer George Packer, on his blog, November 5

Those are the more cringe-worthy reactions. Other Obama supporters were simply indecipherable.

"Youths literally run the world. Kids probably have the loudest voice together than anyone."

—actress Hayden Panetierre, quoted in the October 27 *Washington Post.*

"The social and political narrative of the last eight years, if you're a young adult, has been 'you are the first generation of the second half of the rest of human existence.' That's a huge psychological undertaking, and I believe it's one that will someday be diagnosed on a massive scale as having led to a kind of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. (Something has to explain away our premature obsession with 1980s nostalgia.) My generation has come to know itself as the generation that should have seen the good days, my, were they spectacular, now take off your shoes and place them on the belt.

"What Barack Obama says to me is these days are good for something."

—singer John Mayer in the *Huffington Post*, October 29

"[Obama] stands on the shoulders of the crowds [in Grant Park] of four decades ago. . . . His rebellion takes the form of practicality. He has the audacity of reason."

—author Todd Gitlin, quoted in the November 5 *New York Times*

Still others focused on the more, um, tangential aspects of Obama's victory.

"Over the coming days and weeks, there will be many 'I never thought I'd see the day' pieces, but none of them will be more overflowing with 'I never thought I'd see the day'-ness than this one. I'm black, you see, and I haven't gained a pound since college. I skip breakfast most days, have maybe half a sandwich for lunch, and sometimes I forget to eat dinner. Just slips my mind. Yesterday morning, I woke up to a new world. America had elected a Skinny Black Guy president.

"I never thought I'd see the day. What were the chances that someone who looked like me would come to lead the most powerful nation on earth? Slim."

—author Colson Whitehead, "Finally, a Thin President," in the November 5 *New York Times*

We hope Whitehead was trying to be funny. ♦

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Thomas Friedman's Civil War

And so it came to pass that when Thomas (*The World Is Flat*) Friedman wrote his first *New York Times* column about the election of the first black president, he declared: "And so it came to pass that on Nov. 4, 2008, shortly after 11 p.m. Eastern time, the American Civil War ended, as a black man . . . won enough electoral votes to become president of the United States."

A sentence or two later Friedman suggests that the first shots of the Civil War were fired at Bull Run—actually, it was at Fort Sumter—but our point is that Barack Obama's electoral triumph, remarkable in itself, could benefit from slightly less breathless rhetoric. The American Civil War, which cost more lives than all other American wars combined, did not end in 2008 but in 1865—or, depending on your point of view, with the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. It did not end with the integration of the armed forces (1948), *Brown* v. *Board of Education* (1954), passage of the Voting Rights Act (1965), or even with Rep. Shirley Chisholm's presidential campaign (1972).

Let's retire this tired, and misleading, cliché.

And while it is true that Senator Obama is our first African-American president, we would counsel the Friedmans and other hyperventilators to tread lightly around that particular hackneyed thought as well. The press has a long and condescending history of overexcitement about (and overinterpretation of) racial "firsts" in our country—so much, indeed, that the meaning of these particular distinctions is lost.

Just in the past few decades in America we have witnessed the first black mayor of Newark, the first black CEO of a Fortune 500 company, the first black senator since Reconstruction, the first black coach of an NFL team, the first black cabinet secretary, the first black star of a network sitcom, the first black Ivy League president, the first black to be a candidate for nomination as vice president by a major party, the first black admiral, the first black governor since Reconstruction, the first black astronaut, the first black Supreme Court justice, and the first black winner of the Academy Award for Best Actress. And the list goes on.

When Jesse Jackson ran for president the first time, in 1984, he liked to say, "American politics will never, ever, be the same again." He was right, of course—but not in the way he meant. The effect of Jackson's candidacy was to transmute its significance from politics to race. Did Jackson's 1984 campaign influence the course of the Reagan presidency or the conservative political ascendancy which ended this year? Of course it didn't. And the election of the first black mayor of a major city (Cleveland, 1967!) neither transformed Cleveland nor much affected conditions in urban America.

It will not be Barack Obama's race, or his status as the latest in a long line of "firsts," that determines his place in history, but his policies as president, which will either succeed or fail. For as Thomas (*The World is Hot, Flat and*

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Crowded) Friedman ought to know, but apparently does not, it was another, earlier president—Abraham Lincoln (1861-65)—who ended the Civil War. ♦

The Richard Nixon Sore Winner Award

The story was told, by his law partner Leonard Garment, if we recall correctly, that Richard Nixon's private reaction upon winning his historic 1972 landslide victory was not delight but a surly vow to get the SOBs who'd opposed him. In that spirit, THE SCRAPBOOK hereby inaugurates the Richard Nixon Sore Winner award, which we will bestow on a semi-regular basis on angry lefties who don't know how to take *yes* for an answer. This week we honor Paul Krugman, whose morning-after November 5 blog for the *New York Times* celebrated the end of "the monster years":

Afraid of monsters

> For the past 14 years America's political life has been largely dominated by, well, monsters. Monsters like Tom DeLay, who suggested that the shootings at Columbine happened because schools teach students the theory of evolution. Monsters like Karl Rove, who declared that liberals wanted to offer "therapy and understanding" to terrorists. Monsters like Dick Cheney, who saw 9/11 as an opportunity to start torturing people.
>
> And in our national discourse, we pretended that these monsters were reasonable, respectable people.

That hilarious, feigned concern for "our national discourse" from a man who does his best to degrade it on a regular basis is what separates a Nobel Prize winner from a run-of-the-mill ranter at the Daily Kos and makes Krugman our first Nixon Sore Winner laureate. ♦

Rather Enjoyable

Even with all the excitement of the presidential election, THE SCRAPBOOK is gratified to report that life goes on. For example, Dan Rather's $70 million lawsuit against CBS is still wending its way slowly through the civil courts in New York.

The suit, for those readers who might not be following the gavel-to-gavel coverage, contends that a panel of outside experts, convened by CBS to evaluate a (discredited) 2004 story on President Bush's service in the Texas Air National Guard, fatally damaged Rather's career by making him the fall guy for the whole disaster, ultimately leading to his retirement as news reader for the *CBS Evening News*.

Angry, angry man

From THE SCRAPBOOK's standpoint, the most enjoyable part of the lawsuit is Rather's contention that CBS assembled the panel, and cooked its conclusions, in order to "mollify the right" and curry favor with George W. Bush, who was running for reelection when the phony story was broadcast. As they might say down in Dan Rather's part of Texas, if you believe that CBS ever breaks a sweat worrying about conservatives in America, or earning points with any Republican administration, we have a bridge made of squashed armadillo shells we'd like to sell you.

The problem for THE SCRAPBOOK is not the particulars of the case—it has long been settled that the Bush/National Guard story, presented by Rather, was a lie based on lies—but which side to root for. Of course, we expect to see Dan Rather lose his preposterous lawsuit—and how nice it would be for him to pay the defendants' legal costs as well—but it sure is tough to conjure up sympathy for CBS. It was the self-styled Tiffany network, after all, that chose Rather to succeed Walter Cronkite in 1981—in preference to, say, Roger Mudd, who would have been a far less catastrophic choice—and it was executives at CBS who stood solidly behind Rather during earlier, equally outrageous, episodes of bias and misreporting. The network's current problems with Dan Rather are entirely its own fault.

So maybe we should settle for strict neutrality. Let CBS's ankles be pecked ad infinitum by Dan Rather, and let the 77-year-old Rather continue broadcasting on the HDNet cable network to his dozens of loyal viewers. The two parties to this ludicrous litigation deserve each other. ♦

Erica Jong's Fear of Losing

Überfeminist author Erica Jong must be breathing a sigh of relief. In an interview in *Corriere della Sera*, and as noted in the *New York Observer*, Jong's fear was that "if Obama loses it will spark the second American Civil War. Blood will run in the streets, believe me. And it's not a coincidence that President Bush recalled soldiers from Iraq for Dick Cheney to lead against American citizens in the

RATHER: DEL FAR

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streets." Highlights, provided to the *Observer*'s Jason Horowitz by Christian Rocca of *Il Foglio* include:

■ "My friends Ken Follett and Susan Cheever are extremely worried. Naomi Wolf calls me every day. Yesterday, Jane Fonda sent me an email to tell me that she cried all night and can't cure her ailing back for all the stress that has reduced her to a bundle of nerves."

Jong, spasm-free

■ "My back is also suffering from spasms, so much so that I had to see an acupuncturist and get prescriptions for Valium."

■ "After having stolen the last two elections, the Republican Mafia . . ."

■ "Bush has transformed America into a police state, from torture to the imprisonment of reporters, to the Patriot Act."

Jong, who fancies herself and novelist Michael Chabon as the intellectual heirs to Susan Sontag and Norman Mailer, must be counting the days until the Inauguration—and the end of war, hunger, poverty, environmental degradation, and fascism. ♦

A Dictionary of Political Clichés, Postelection Edition

In our last episode two weeks ago ("Flaubert Gets Updated for 2008," by Matthew Continetti), we encouraged readers to send in their contributions to our ongoing dictionary of political clichés. Here's what you came up with:

Change We Can Believe In. "A selective suspension of disbelief by a potential voter, which allows him to believe the message of a candidate that is specifically tailored to positions they already hold." (*David Mayes, Columbus, Ohio*)

Folks. "A term that the Beltway/NYC crowd has picked up from the Obama campaign, apparently to refer to those whom they presume to be the great unwashed, and who are deeply in need of their spiritual guidance." (*Mary Daly, Littleton, N.H.*)

Folks

Swing State. "A geographical jurisdiction whose residents are forced to endure endless negative political advertisements and significant logistic hassles, including waiting in long lines of traffic while Secret Service and other police block off key arteries several times each day for presidential candidates or other politicos passing through to appeal for the six or seven votes that are actually up for grabs in the state." (*Mason Blaich, Albuquerque, N.M.*)

And here are some more entries from the staff of The Weekly Standard:

Close the Sale. The signing of papers that allow the guy from Illinois to take possession of the presidential limo, White House, and Air Force One.

Closing Argument. A lawyer's final summary of his case. Joe Biden's can last for hours and has been known to drive juries into mild catatonia.

First Class Temperament. Used to describe, well, you-know-who. The phrase comes from Oliver Wendell Holmes, who used it to describe FDR. If you use this phrase, you get Double Pundit Points: Not only is it the same thing that everyone else is saying, but it also suggests deep historical knowledge.

Green Jobs. Jobs held by the Jolly Green Giant, Oscar the Grouch, that chick from the original Star Trek, Pete's Dragon, the Green Lantern, Greedo, and the Green Arrow. We need more of these.

Greedo, green jobber

Ground Game. Marbles, hopscotch, jump rope, tiddly-winks, etc.

Mandate. When two straight guys go out to dinner and a movie (not that there's anything wrong with that!).

Mandate

Resonate. Your argument needs to do this. It's no longer enough to persuade, cajole, or reason with voters. What's important is that you resonate. Here's how: Hold all campaign events in Luray Caverns, Va., an empty concert hall, or in the Alps. ♦

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DEAN BARNETT, 1967-2008

Courage, Aristotle says somewhere, is the first of the virtues, because courage makes the other virtues possible. Our friend and colleague Dean Barnett was brave. He was brave to a degree that perhaps only his beloved wife, Kirstan, and others in his immediate family were able to appreciate.

Dean rarely talked to his friends about what he had done over the years—or what he had to do every day—to overcome his cystic fibrosis, diagnosed in infancy. But overcome it he did. Until it finally cut his life short. Still, as Nancy Zimmerman, one of Dean's friends, put it in an email a few hours after his death on October 27, "More life in 41 years than five people cram in 80."

Now, courage is a stern virtue—and those who have courage are usually sober and serious. Dean, though, was effervescently witty and high-spirited. He had a most unusual combination of strength of character and lightness of heart.

And he had great generosity of spirit. Dean befriended, promoted, and helped lots of people without talking about it or taking credit. Dean wasn't a softy—he had been a legal headhunter, and he had good judgment about people. But he was a remarkably good-natured and kind man—not qualities that always go with being very smart, which he also was. And there was nothing petty about him.

All of us at THE WEEKLY STANDARD have been amazed by the tributes to Dean that have come flowing in. Dean affected not just those who knew him personally, but also many who corresponded with him but never met him, and many who simply knew him from reading his work. He touched an awful lot of people, of all ages and types, and touched them deeply. Some he taught about politics, some about the Red Sox or golf courses or HBO series, some about how to write and think—and some about life.

Those of us who were fortunate to have been his friends—and how we wish we could have been his friends for many more years!—will always have the satisfaction of remembering him vividly, as he was in person. It was a privilege to see up close Dean's wit, and his courage, and his character. As Richard Starr put it,

> Of the writers I have worked with over the years, none was sweeter, more cheerful, and less self-pitying than Dean. Like his other friends and correspondents, I cherished his emails and phone calls—among other reasons because they always lightened the day's load, rather than adding to it.

One of the many, many emails I received after Dean's death was from our friend Tom Cotton, who recently deployed to Afghanistan. He wrote:

> I learned about Dean's death early this morning (local time) before going on my first really long patrol here. We drove about eight hours round trip, so I had lots of time to think. Like you, what struck me most about Dean was his remarkable courage in the face of his disease. Dean had the heart of a lion, as brave as any soldier I've known. And there was his generosity. I first started reading Dean's writing while in Iraq and he always returned my emails quickly. When I got back stateside, he went out of his way to meet me when I visited Boston and always made time for a phone call. Like so many, I was lucky and honored to call Dean my friend. I will miss him dearly.

I too will miss him dearly. I already do.

A couple of years ago, Dean commented:

> When you see death up close, a couple of things become clear. One is that we all die, and that death is just part of the deal. The other is that life is such a blessing, that it's just so great, even though you know the inevitable might be near you still want as many bites of the apple as possible.
>
> None of us knows what the future of the salt water treatment might be. . . . The good times could continue for years, or it could all crash tomorrow. But regardless, this treatment has given me time—time to spend with my wife and family and friends. Time to hit golf balls (usually sideways, but even that's all right). Time to chase my dogs around the house. Time that frankly I didn't expect to have. There could be no greater gift, and it's a miracle in so many ways.

Dean's life was a miracle in so many ways. We at THE WEEKLY STANDARD mourn his loss but cherish his memory—and his life—as a blessing.

WILLIAM KRISTOL

EDITOR'S NOTE: *After Dean Barnett's death on October 27, dozens of people who had come to know him through his writing for this magazine and elsewhere, and in his earlier career as a Boston-based businessman, wrote memorials, a small selection of which we excerpt below.*

I remember meeting the Barnett brothers. It was 1994, and I was running against Ted Kennedy. Keith, now a lawyer in Boston, was jovial and enthusiastic. Dean was more laid-back. He had a knowing smile—like he hadn't caught the canary yet, but he had it locked in a room. Over that campaign and over the years that followed, I got to know Dean very well. And I learned why he was smiling—Dean was "wicked smart," as they say around here. He had extraordinary

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perspective and insight. He brought a lot more to our friendship than I ever could have imagined.

Dean didn't tell me that he had cystic fibrosis—I heard it from an acquaintance. Dean was too intent on giving to our friendship to expect me to give something back to him. Over the years, I knew of his visits to the hospital and bouts with complications, but Dean's smile and generosity of spirit never faltered.

Perhaps his unusual appreciation for the precious value of life enabled Dean to see what others missed, to cut to the nub, and to dispense with excuse and correctness. What it meant to me was advice and counsel that came clean and sharp. What it meant to his readers and listeners was unadorned truth and honest expression. We will miss Dean for what he saw and said. I will miss him for that and for much more. He was the real deal.

Mitt Romney

But for his great love of golf, Dean might have taken on full time radio work, but the combination of the opportunities allowed by new media and of regular guest hosting scratched his itch to participate in the great debates of our time. Dean told me early in our friendship that his disease had forced him to deal with the possibility of living too short a life and that he thus threw himself into everything. This ferocious desire to live well and fully is what I will always tell people marked Dean Barnett. His extraordinary story is told in his pamphlet *The Plucky Smart Kid with the Fatal Disease*, and his life will long be an example to others battling with cystic fibrosis. I hope we can report someday soon the news that a cure for CF is in hand, and on that day toast Dean for all he did to raise awareness of the disease. I will also toast him whenever I hear smart, persuasive arguments on behalf of common sense conservatism and fierce attachment to the opportunities liberty bestows.

Hugh Hewitt

Dean had many virtues, both as a writer and a man, but the one I admired most was his sense of charity. Dean was inclined to think the best of people, even people with whom he disagreed or, in the extremely rare case, didn't much like. Charity is rare,

Dean Barnett

THOMAS FLUHARTY

particularly in writing, where it is so terribly easy to assume the worst or to be unkind. His charitableness is what first attracted me to Dean. It's what marked him as a rare talent and, more important, a great man.

Jonathan V. Last

Dean was a sterling example of the democratizing power of the Internet to bring forward voices that, in previous generations, might never have found the proper vehicle for meaningful self-expression. He was a natural, a fluent and fluid prose stylist of uncommon good humor. The fact that he found such good cheer in such difficult times surely had something to do with the remarkably good-natured, matter-of-fact, and quietly brave way he lived with his cystic fibrosis, about which he wrote as lucidly as he wrote almost everything else. I had literally hundreds of email exchanges with him, and they were highlights of every day on which I was lucky to participate in them. This is yet another remarkable quality of the Internet—that it creates new kinds of friendships based on very old epistolary models. He was one of nature's noblemen. *Zikhrono Liv'rackha*—may his memory be for a blessing.

John Podhoretz

He didn't mean to, but Dean astonished us, living life with a brutal disease the way he did, hand firmly on the throttle of it, no goggles, no fear of the sharp curves, and, most important, no excuses. He didn't mean to, but Dean implicitly challenged others to venture off the flat driveways.

I met Dean by becoming a faithful reader of his beloved Soxblog. After a time, he asked me to become a co-blogger, and insisted that I use the *nom de blog* of "Carl Bernard" (paying homage to Carl Yastrzemski and Bernie Carbo). I considered him an intellectual brother-in-arms. The situation was more realistically akin to a varsity quarterback letting a peach-fuzzed freshman sit in on a few practices "to get a feel for the game." Dean practiced hard.

Dean had run a business and had worked on "commission," pursuits that create a healthy respect for the complexities of the world. And yes, Dean had a brain worthy of Harvard, his alma mater. But what truly distinguished his writings was his ability "to size things" up instantly, and to do so wisely. This gift is God-given, severely rationed, and most in demand in the Internet age. Dean had this rare gift, and he shared it with us.

He once wrote of his health that "the good times could continue for years, or it could all crash tomorrow." Yes, the good times crashed, as he knew they inevitably would, but they crashed with Dean's hands on the throttle.

Paul Seyferth

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REBUILD AFTER METH

The headlines about methamphetamine—meth—have been grim. This highly addictive drug leaves a path of destruction that hurts families and entire communities. Users suffer severe health consequences; children are often neglected; and communities face dangerous crime and overburdened law enforcement.

Are we making strides in the fight against meth? Absolutely. From first responders to substance abuse professionals, those who work on the frontlines to combat meth recognize the progress.

- ***Meth use among youth and young adults has declined significantly since 2002.***[1]
- ***More meth users are seeking help. Meth treatment admissions have more than tripled in the past decade.***[2]
- ***And law enforcement officials are finding fewer and fewer domestic meth labs—meth lab seizures in the U.S. have decreased dramatically since 2004.***[3]

There is still work to be done, however — from eradicating meth production and distribution to helping those battling addiction. Consider Teresa. She is a mother, Girl Scout volunteer, and website developer. Her life took a sharp turn when she started using meth to lose weight. Her story went from bad to worse as she abandoned her family, including her 4-year-old daughter, for nearly a year in the search for her next high. She eventually entered a treatment program and made a commitment to conquer her addiction. Today, she is drug-free and a leader in anti-meth efforts in her community. There are thousands of people like Teresa out there, showing individuals and communities what they need to know.

- ***Treatment is available, and it works.***
- ***Drug addiction treatment is cost-effective—for every $1 invested in drug treatment programs, there is a $12 savings in crime and health care costs.***[4]

Each year, nearly 150,000 people are admitted to treatment for methamphetamine.[5] And outcomes for meth users entering treatment are comparable to those for users of other similar drugs.[6] Find out about substance abuse treatment, and support meth treatment in your community.

Learn more at methresources.gov or call 1-800-662-HELP.

American Society of Addiction Medicine
Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)
National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers
NAADAC, Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association of Counties
National Association of Social Workers
National Conference of State Legislatures
National Drug Enforcement Officers Association
National Narcotics Officers' Association Coalition
The Partnership for a Drug-Free America
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
State Associations of Addiction Services

[1]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2002-2006, Table 8.40B.
[2]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2007, Table 1b.
[3]DOJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, National Methamphetamine Threat Assessment 2008, December 2007.
[4]National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide," 2000.
[5]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2007, Table 1a.
[6]National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide," 2000.

Office of National Drug Control Policy

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the weekly Standard

President Obama

In politics, as one suspects in life, no good deed goes unpunished. John McCain staked everything on success in Iraq. He advocated the surge publicly and made the case for it privately. He defended it passionately and intelligently, and was indispensable in beating back critics, shoring up nervous supporters, and keeping enough public support for the surge so the Democratic party's repeated efforts to abort it failed.

The surge worked. It worked better than even its proponents expected. The strategic and moral calamity of an American withdrawal in defeat from the central front in the war on Islamic jihadism was averted. The positive outcome of a reasonably stable, democratic, and friendly Iraq is now in sight. Thanks in large part to John McCain, we did not have a second Vietnam-like humiliation. Thanks in large part to John McCain, the United States is on the verge of snatching victory from the jaws of defeat.

And as a result of the remarkable progress in Iraq over the past two years—progress whose possibility was scoffed at and whose reality was then denied by all leading Democrats except Joe Lieberman—Iraq faded as an issue in the presidential race. And with it, the critical question of who should be commander in chief also receded. By the fall of 2008, McCain got no credit for one of the great acts of statesmanship by a senator—let alone a senator who was also a presidential candidate—in American history. President Obama will now be able to draw down in an orderly manner, following (we trust) the guidance of Generals Petraeus and Odierno—generals who consulted with McCain often and whose achievement McCain helped make possible.

John McCain said repeatedly that he'd rather lose an election than lose a war. We ended up winning a war, and he ended up losing the election. It's not quite the cosmic injustice of the British electorate rejecting Churchill in 1945—but it's no small injustice either.

McCain lost in part because everyone wanted a change from President Bush, and McCain was from the same party as Bush. But, the much-derided Bush administration (and they deserve some of the derision) did succeed in preventing a second terrorist attack in the United States over the last seven years. This fact, like Iraq, barely came up in the presidential campaign. In October 2000, after eight years of the Clinton administration, a strengthening al Qaeda attacked the U.S.S. *Cole* in Aden, killing 17 servicemen and wounding 39. No such thing happened in 2008. Al Qaeda today seems in retreat. But most voters did not let keeping us safe at home, any more than winning a war abroad, determine their vote.

Encouraging Americans' tendency to take hard-won national security successes for granted—once they are won—is the key to how Democrats, in modern times, win presidential elections. Dwight Eisenhower pursued a cautious but not ineffective foreign policy. Voters were unimpressed by the peace and stability of 1960 and chose John Kennedy. Partly as a result of Kennedy's initial weakness, the Berlin Wall went up and the Cuban Missile Crisis followed—and then, partly out of a felt need of Lyndon Johnson's to appear strong, we escalated in Vietnam.

The voters elected Richard Nixon to extricate us from the quagmire in Vietnam with honor, which he did, and Gerald Ford attempted to prevent the Democratic Congress from walking away from our ally and our responsibility. Voters decided, however, to give the presidency back to the party of JFK and LBJ—by this time more the party of George McGovern—and we got the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

So Americans elected Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, and—stunningly—they won the Cold War virtually without firing a shot. (Bush also drove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait.) Voters were able in 1992 to take peace for granted and to focus on domestic policy. "It's the economy, stupid" was stupid but successful just as its equivalents had been in 1976 and 1960.

We think it was a similar mistake to select Barack Obama over John McCain in 2008. We hope we're proved wrong. We're encouraged that President-elect Obama has seemed at times during this campaign to understand it's a dangerous world, that he'll be tested, and that weakness is provocative and dangerous. We're pleased that the president-elect is committed to building up the military, succeeding in Afghanistan, defending our allies, and, of course, keeping the country safe.

We at The Weekly Standard congratulate Barack Obama on his impressive victory. We pledge our support for those of his policies we can support, our willingness to give him the benefit of the doubt in cases of uncertainty, and our constructive criticism and loyal opposition where we are compelled to differ. We hope President Obama's policies and decisions will strengthen the nation he will now lead, and that our country and the cause of freedom in the world will emerge from the next four or eight years even stronger than they are today.

—*William Kristol*

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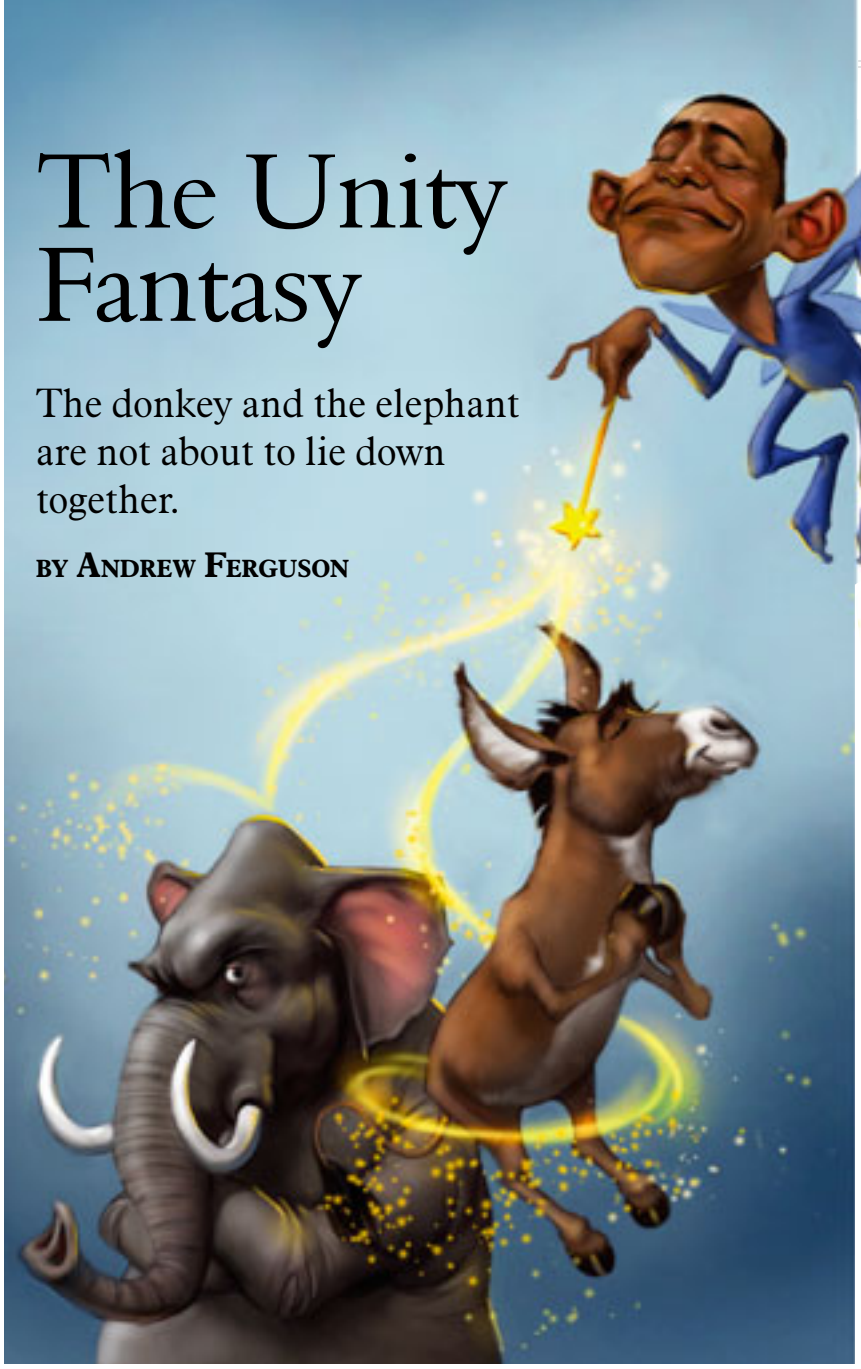
The Unity Fantasy

The donkey and the elephant are not about to lie down together.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON



To those Americans whose support I have yet to earn—I may not have won your vote, but I hear your voices, I need your help, and I will be your president too.

—Barack Obama, November 4, 2008

Today I want to speak to every person who voted for my opponent: To make this nation stronger and better I will need your support, and I will work to earn it. I will do all I can do to deserve your trust. A new term is a new opportunity to reach out to the whole nation. We have one country, one Constitution and one future that binds us. And when we come together and work together, there is no limit to the greatness of America.

—George W. Bush, November 3, 2004

He was a college professor with strong political opinions—two marks against him right there—but even so he seemed to be a very smart man. Like all but 17 of America's college professors, he was an Obama supporter. He had noted my skepticism.

"But don't you see Obama has the potential to be a unifying force," he said. "He could bring the country together, the way Reagan did to win the Cold War."

I didn't know what to say. How do these things get started? Reagan as a unifying force?

I spent a lot of time during the Reagan years in faculty lounges, on college campuses, with men and women just like this professor, and I don't remember Reagan as a unifying force. Just about everybody I knew hated him—really couldn't stand him, with a teeth-grinding, skin-crawling disdain. Even beyond the leafy lotus land of higher- ed, he was acknowledged by admirer and critic alike as a "polarizing presence." Weekend after weekend, protesters swelled our great cities and hoisted placards calling him either a psychopath or a buffoon (they could never decide which). His foremost political adversary, Tip O'Neill, said he "had ice water for blood." His landslide reelection victory in 1984 was impressive, but even then, at the zenith of his presidency, more than 40 percent of voters wanted to give him the boot. For that matter, his victory in 1984 wasn't as big as the victory recorded in 1972 by Richard Nixon. Now *there* was a unifying force.

Only in retrospect has Reagan been tagged as a twinkly, grandfatherly presence, a firm but gentle leader who transcended ideology and brought us together to defeat the Soviet Empire. Things didn't go so smoothly at the time. In his dealings with the Soviets, for example, Reagan was hampered at every step—first by liberals for being too rough, then by conservatives for being too soft. The firing of the air traffic controllers, the huge tax cuts of 1981, the huge tax hike of 1982 (in the middle of a recession!), the nuclear freeze movement, aid to the contras and to the mujahedeen, the "three million" homeless, budget cuts, the invasion of Grenada, the Iran-contra scandal and the subsequent calls for impeachment—the real story of the Reagan years is a story of endless contention, much of it bitter, wrenching,

DAVE MALAN

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and, to a squeamish public, unpleasant to watch.

What fogs our memory and makes the retrospective Reagan seem like a unifying force is his success. Success, they say, has a thousand fathers, and we kid ourselves into believing we all of us were papa to the Reagan revolution. According to today's popular accounts he won the Cold War and touched off a great economic boom, so of course the country stood unified in support. Who, after all, could have argued with such improbable accomplishments as they took shape? Everybody loved him!

Trust me, though: They didn't.

Our infatuation with "unity" is a recurring delusion of American politics. Among the many examples are the hapless attempts that political geeks make year after year to form third parties that will transcend ideology and return us to our natural, prelapsarian state of cooperation. Ross Perot capitalized on the delusion by telling voters they could join together, hire a managerial expert to run the government "like a business," and do away with a political class that was driving them apart (and not paying enough attention to him). The most recent and consequential example of it is the mesmerism of Barack Obama's presidential campaign.

Unity is a phantasm raising hopes for something that can't be delivered—or that, once delivered, would be so un-American it would scare us half to death. Yet unity was Obama's theme. The sales pitch was a proposition that seemed self-evident: The only way "to get things done" and "move this country forward" was to "bring us together," just as we believe Reagan did even though he didn't.

Whether Obama really thinks such a thing is possible is anybody's guess. He doesn't look like a cynic to me. As a career politician, he has been required by his profession to face opponents and defeat them if he wants to get his way. Division is what politicians do. He's got to know this, even if his blissed-out followers don't. In his endless campaign, though, he never stopped talking as if the clashing political interests and contending ideas of a big, complicated, self-governing country were all just a terrible misunderstanding. His final stump speech—which his campaign called, with customary pomposity, the "closing argument," as though the candidate had suddenly turned into Perry Mason—was drenched in togetherness. Right at the top he promised that his victory would "put an end to the politics that would divide a nation just to win an election; that tries to pit region against region, city against town, Republican against Democrat . . . "

Obama's theatrical gift is such that his listeners seldom pause to think about what he's saying. He communicates through a kind of subverbal music, half-heard and absorbed rather than cogitated on. But consider that promise above. What kind of "politics . . . divides the nation just to win an election"? Well, every kind. Elections presuppose a divided nation; if the nation weren't divided it wouldn't need an election. Besides, politics, of whatever kind, doesn't cause the divisions; it expresses them and clarifies them. Experience shows that this method of expressing division is far preferable to the alternatives, which often involve bazookas. You will note too that he declares his contempt for a politics that pits Republicans against Democrats. Republicans pitted against Democrats? Horrifying. Please make it stop.

And of course Obama's chief pledge is to make it stop. He'll be elected and unity will ensue. But how? It goes without saying that the easiest way to unify the country is to eliminate those elements within it that make trouble for the unifier. Stalinists and Nazis were terrific at unifying countries. Their techniques are closed to him, of course, Obama being neither a Stalinist nor a Nazi but only a hardworking, ambitious, well-meaning American pol. But in dealing with the wayward elements, he has other options. He can declare that the nonunifiers are philosophically or morally indecent. Or he can pretend they don't exist.

Obama does both, depending on the rhetorical point he's trying to make. When his opponents dissented from his tax plan, he said they were making "a virtue of selfishness." They were, he said, coddling criminal CEOs and responding with Pavlovian discipline to the commands of sleazy lobbyists. They refused to honor American troops and veterans. Their cynicism was instinctual. Obama's "new politics of unity" would end "the old politics of division" by labeling those old politicians and their arguments irredeemably corrupt, hence unworthy of consideration. Obama's supporters were asked to divide the country between those who were united—that would be them—and those who weren't, for whatever reason. In a platform trick reminiscent of Huey Long, Obama actually asked his supporters during campaign rallies how much money they made, the better to drive them away from the unsavory, nonunited elements that earn more than they do.

When these elements have been dispensed with, unity becomes a simple matter of people identifying their own best interests and falling into one another's arms. In his stump speech, Obama pretended that every major political disagreement was merely the consequence of a false choice. "When it comes to health care," he said, "we don't have to choose between a government-run health care system and the unaffordable one we have now." But of course nobody—really, nobody—thinks those are the only alternatives in the health care debate. "When it comes to jobs," he said, "the choice in this election is not between putting up a wall around America or allowing every job to disappear overseas." Who says it is? "When it comes to giving every child a world-class education," he said, "the choice is not between more money and more reform."

This is more than rhetorical license. By positioning himself as the third way between two absurd alternatives that no one favors, Obama has persuaded voters of his reasonableness and moderation; and thus of his ability to get things done. That illusory advantage will go poof soon enough,

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though. Think about his third way in education reform. There he sits, or so he says, nobly perched between the (nonexistent) more-money and more-reform factions. President Bush, if I can mention the unmentionable, thought he was putting himself in the same position in 2001. He managed to bring his "conservative reformers" together with liberals like Senator Edward Kennedy, water carrier for the educational establishment. Together they produced a complicated and expensive set of reforms that appeared to lasso every warring faction into a united effort.

The unity didn't last long, as you've probably noticed, though in a way, I suppose, No Child Left Behind did prove a unifying force: When put into practice, it managed to frustrate and anger nearly every interested party—for contradictory and irreconcilable reasons. When the law lapses next year, President Obama will find himself smack in the middle of these crosswires, where every move touches off an explosion, often on time-release, set to blow when you least expect it. If we're lucky he won't go back to blaming criminal CEOs and sleazy lobbyists. But we probably won't be lucky.

Like vacation brochures or soft-core pornography or TV ads for Ronco's Chop-O-Matic, political campaigns are exercises in fantasy. They sell something that could never exist in the real world, at least in its advertised form. Certainly the campaign of Obama's opponent—who promised, among much else, to balance the federal budget in four years—was built largely on fantasy. Reagan sold some fantasies of his own, as his critics never tired of pointing out. Obama's chief fantasy is that he's a politician who will relieve us of the burden of politics. He may wind up, like Reagan, a successful president. But if he does, it will be because, like Reagan, he engaged his ideological and political opponents in ferocious battles and beat them. Maybe unity will ensue—but only in hindsight, 20 years on or more, after we've forgotten how we got there. ♦

Supposing Obama Were a Bipartisan

What then?

BY PETER BERKOWITZ

In August 2004, a then-obscure Illinois state senator delivered a dazzling keynote address at the Democratic National Convention. Of special interest, because it departed from the election season's bitter partisanship, was his eloquent insistence on the unity undergirding the nation's great diversity:

> There's not a liberal America and a conservative America; there's the United States of America.
>
> There's not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America.
>
> The pundits like to slice and dice our country into red states and blue states: red states for Republicans, blue states for Democrats. But I've got news for them, too. We worship an awesome God in the blue states, and we don't like federal agents poking around our libraries in the red states.
>
> We coach little league in the blue states and, yes, we've got some gay friends in the red states.
>
> There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq, and there are patriots who supported the war in Iraq.
>
> We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the Stars and Stripes, all of us defending the United States of America.

As a result of his decisive victory on November 4, Barack Obama will have the opportunity to match deeds to words by governing as president not only of the 53 percent of the electorate who voted for him but of the 47 percent who did not.

It won't be easy. All of his professional and political life, Obama has made his home on the left wing of the Democratic party. And, though to listen to the mainstream media one would think that only John McCain and Sarah Palin played political hardball, Obama's successful campaign was highly partisan, which is natural in the rough and tumble of electioneering, with the highest office in the land on the line.

Nevertheless, when accepting his party's nomination at the 2008 Democratic National Convention, before 80,000 cheering supporters at Denver's Invesco Field, Obama reaffirmed his belief in a common American core beneath respectable partisan differences:

> The men and women who serve in our battlefields may be Democrats and Republicans and Independents, but they have fought together and bled together and some died together under the same proud flag. They have not served a Red America or a Blue America—they have served the United States of America.

Part of America's greatness, Obama rightly observed, is its "promise of a democracy where we can find the strength and grace to bridge divides and unite in common effort." And after the votes had been counted, late on Election Night, in front of a jubilant crowd jammed into Chicago's Grant Park, Obama sounded this theme one more time:

> [W]hile the Democratic Party has won a great victory tonight, we do so with a measure of humility and determination to heal the divides that have held back our progress. As Lincoln said to a nation far

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more divided than ours, "We are not enemies, but friends . . . though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection." And to those Americans whose support I have yet to earn—I may not have won your vote, but I hear your voices, I need your help, and I will be your President too.

All Americans should hope that the 44th president of the United States has the courage and sober judgment to honor these solemn commitments.

It is to be expected that Obama will govern as a progressive. But there are measures he could back as president and appointments he could make—consistent with the larger progressive spirit—that would show respect for conservative concerns and accord with principles that, at their best moments, both right and left in America embrace. Here are seven:

(1) Obama should defend the integrity and independence of the executive branch that he will soon head by resisting calls from congressional Democrats to pursue criminal investigations of Bush administration officials—the foundations for which were laid by hearings conducted last spring by House Judiciary Committee chairman John Conyers Jr.—for policy decisions they made about how to wage the war on terror. Obama should also speak out forcefully against efforts by European judges who invoke claims of universal jurisdiction to indict Bush administration officials as war criminals. One sure consequence of the criminalization of national security policy differences is the weakening of the office of the president, which, over the long term, will hurt both parties and the nation. Beyond that, the prosecution and imprisonment of defeated or disfavored officials is typical of dictatorships but is incompatible with the peaceful transfer of power that is a hallmark of democracy.

(2) Obama should reappoint Robert Gates secretary of defense. By putting the Department of Defense on a steady course after the volatile Rumsfeld years, Gates has earned the respect and admiration of the uniformed military and the Pentagon. In an area where Obama has little experience, reappointing Gates would show that he recognizes that he is a wartime president and that he stands to benefit from a seasoned veteran with a distinguished track record who could lend continuity to national security during a period of transition.

(3) Obama's first appointment to the Supreme Court should be a judge's judge, a Democrat no doubt, but one who commands the respect of conservative court watchers. By virtue of his knowledge of the law and his judicial temperament and integrity, Merrick Garland, a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit appointed by Bill Clinton in 1997, comes to mind.

(4) Obama should institute a practice of regular consultation with members of Congress, including Republicans, perhaps inviting them to the White House once a month to compare notes and exchange views. On the campaign trail, Obama promised something similar, saying he would "call for a standing, bipartisan Consultative Group of congressional leaders on national security." This is a good start, but meetings with both parties' legislators should not be limited to national security. Such meetings cost little, provide the opportunity to build good will and understanding, and can contribute to setting that new tone in Washington of which candidates every four years speak.

(5) Obama, who has touted his support for charter schools, should endorse school choice. Certainly in inner cities where public schools have for decades been broken and have proven resistant to reform, Obama should favor efforts to provide low-income parents with the means to send their children to schools where they actually have the chance to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic.

(6) Obama should clearly state his opposition to reviving the so-called Fairness Doctrine, which Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Senators Dick Durbin and Charles Schumer have called for. Conservatives see it as a thinly veiled effort to suppress conservative talk-radio by demanding that stations that feature conservative stars such as Sean Hannity and Rush Limbaugh provide the left with equal opportunities to broadcast their views. Even if the measure has little chance of passing, conservatives would appreciate Obama's explicit rejection of it. This is not only because it is aimed at a conservative advantage, but also because as conceived it invites an appalling and unconstitutional regulation of political speech by Congress. It is one thing to require radio and TV stations, which broadcast over public airwaves, to give opposing candidates a fair chance to express their views. It is quite another to put government in the business of determining what sort of programming would balance Hannity and Limbaugh, which, in fairness, would also require government to determine what sort would balance NPR.

(7) Obama should call on public universities to abolish campus speech codes and vigorously protect students' and faculty members' speech rights. By doing this Obama would score big with conservatives. He would also position progressives where they belong: on the side of free speech, vigorous debate, impartial inquiry, and openness to opposing points of view.

Although nothing in these proposals violates fundamental progressive tenets, all would undoubtedly irritate or anger one Democratic party constituency or another. Nevertheless, by adopting them, Obama would show that he is a man of his word who believes what he has emphatically said about bridging divides and uniting in common efforts by listening to conservatives and enlisting their support.

More than that, adopting these proposals would also serve the public. Coming from a Democrat in the White House, it would send the message to conservatives and progressives alike that, for all their genuine differences of opinion, left and right in America share important interests and fundamental principles and, by working together, can bring about change that both sides can believe in. ♦

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Put on a Happy Face

The Republican challenge.

BY FRED BARNES

Republicans have a big problem. Nope, it's not figuring out how to rebuild their party after consecutive defeats in national elections (that's easy). Nor is it finding new leaders in Congress (also easy) or latching onto fresh ideas that might improve the Republican brand (easiest of all). The problem is simpler—but also more difficult—than those. It's the tricky business of dealing with President Barack Obama.

For starters, Republicans should recognize their position in relation to Obama. For the time being anyway, he's a colossus astride the continent, the most commanding political presence since Ronald Reagan arrived in Washington. He's the star. Republicans are extras. If they attract attention, it's likely to be because they've done something the media consider outrageous or dumb.

There are five areas in which Republicans need to be as smart, cool-headed, and disciplined as Obama was during the campaign, and may continue to be as president-elect and president.

The Obama Honeymoon. He's going to have one, big time. It will probably linger into the early months of his presidency. Americans desperately want to feel good about a new president even if they didn't vote for him. This is especially true in Obama's case since he's our first African-American president.

Americans have a genuine sense of pride in this breakthrough for two reasons. Obama mentions one of them frequently. It's "only in America" that a black man, a member of a minority group, could be elected leader of the country. The other reason: It's the biggest step in overcoming America's racial past since the Civil Rights movement. I suspect a solid majority of Republican and conservative voters feel this way at the moment.

> Pelosi and Reid are hopelessly partisan. But there's Obama. His most popular promise, in speech after speech, has been to begin a new era of bipartisanship. Every voter in America must be aware of this promise. Republicans ought to hold him to it.

As the honeymoon drags on, Republicans may grow weary of the hero worship, but there's nothing they can do to change it. Routinely complaining about Obama's selection of a White House staff and cabinet will come off as small-minded and petty. The temptation to zing Obama should be resisted. The smarter tactic, given the inevitability of an extravagant Obama coronation, is to grin and bear it.

Republican Cooperation. For now, congressional Republicans need to emphasize their eagerness to forge bipartisan compromises with Democrats. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell has already done some of this. There's a good bit of fakery involved. McConnell and his House counterparts know perfectly well there's little chance of actually reaching agreement on small issues and no chance at all on big ones. Still, offering alternatives to Democratic legislation is wise. Republicans will look high-minded.

For sheer hypocrisy, Republican happy talk about cooperation doesn't come close to that of House speaker Nancy Pelosi. "The country must be governed from the middle," she declared last week. Democrats will operate "in a strong bipartisan way with civility in our debate and fiscal responsibility in our budgeting," she added assuringly. Later in the week, she proposed two costly "stimulus" bills with no Republican input.

Republicans can forget about Pelosi and Senate majority leader Harry Reid. They're hopelessly partisan. But there's Obama. His most popular promise, in speech after speech, has been to unify the country and begin a new era of bipartisanship in Washington. Every voter in America must be aware of this promise. Republicans ought to hold him to it. When Pelosi and Reid balk, Republicans should call on Obama to redeem his promise. They should do this relentlessly. They'll have public sentiment on their side.

Republican Patience. This is a trait rarely found in politicians, much less in Republican politicians. But it's a virtue that can make Republicans look calm and responsible. The idea is to hold their fire until Democrats unleash the liberal agenda on Congress. That means their opposition to popular liberal bills, like funding for child health care, should be low-key and never obstreperous. Democrats will bring these up early next year, and they'll attract some Republican support.

With their reduced numbers Republicans won't be able to force Obama to commit errors. But unforced errors will come soon enough. The most egregious parts of the liberal agenda are unforced errors all by themselves:

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card check, the Fairness Doctrine, the Freedom of Choice Act removing all limits on abortion on demand, tax hikes and spending excesses, reimposing the ban on offshore drilling for oil and gas, and much, much more. "We have to propose a radically different pathway," says Republican representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin. "We haven't done that."

Blame Game. Republicans shouldn't indulge in recriminations. This is one way to get press attention, but there's a political price. The media love it when Republicans attack Republicans—because it makes Republicans look bad. Does anyone think better of the McCain campaign now that unnamed aides are leaking nasty stories about Sarah Palin? Hardly.

Throwing around blame will only strengthen Obama's hand. He'll look like the true adult in Washington. After Hillary Clinton lost the Democratic nomination to Obama, her top advisers began attacking each other. This reinforced the idea that her loss was deserved. Republicans shouldn't follow the Clinton model.

Republican Weakness. Where is it? In the Northeast, across the upper Midwest, and in cities and upscale suburbs. To gain a majority in Congress, Republicans will have to win House and Senate seats in those places. To win the presidency, they'll have to appeal to voters in those locations.

Republicans in Washington must keep these voters—they're more moderate than conservative—in mind and avoid alienating them. Republicans don't need to jettison conservative principles. Ryan, the party's most innovative thinker, says Republicans need only apply these principles to the new political era, and moderates will be comfortable with the result.

One more thing is essential, according to Ryan. "We've got to be happy warriors," he says. "We've got to stop being the angry white guy party." Otherwise, Republicans will play right into Obama's hands. ♦

NEWSCOM

The Emerging Majority

It's not Republican.

BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

Obama supporters

Small changes can have dramatic consequences. The electorate shifted about 4 points toward the Democrats in between the 2004 and 2008 elections—from 48.3 percent of the popular vote four years ago to 52.5 percent today. But those 4 points gave Obama the largest share of the vote since 1988, the best showing by a Democrat since 1964, the first black president, the first non-southern Democratic president since John F. Kennedy, and likely larger Democratic majorities in Congress than when President Clinton took office in 1993. In a closely divided America, a swing of four votes in a hundred can mean a decisive victory.

Obama's achievement can be explained with a few numbers. The first is 27 percent—President Bush's approval rating in the national exit poll. Pretty dismal. The poll found that voters were split on whether John McCain would continue Bush's policies. But those who thought McCain would be another Bush broke overwhelmingly for Obama, 91 percent to 8. That's a huge, damning margin.

The second number is 93 percent. That's the percentage of voters who gave the economy a negative rating in the exit poll. They supported Obama. And they were right to give the economy a negative rating. The financial crisis is spilling over into the real economy of goods and services. Unemployment is rising and consumption is falling. The week before the election, the Commerce Department announced that consumer spending had dropped 3.1 percent. Consumer spending hadn't fallen since 1991, and this year's decline was the largest since 1980. The day before the election, the auto com-

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panies announced that they had had their worst month in a quarter-century. When economic conditions are as bad as this, of course the party out of power is favored to win an election.

Considering those numbers, the 2008 electoral map isn't all that surprising. Bush, the economy, and Obama's personal and political appeal have pushed the nation toward the blue end of the political spectrum. But, for the most part, the shift is gradual and on the margins. Obama will be president because he took states that Bush won in tight races four years ago. Bush won Ohio by 2 points in 2004. This year Obama won it by 4. Bush won Florida by 5 points in 2004. This year Obama won it by 2.5 points.

Obama's victories in the West were impressive. Bush won Colorado by 5 points in 2004. Obama won it by 7. Bush won New Mexico by 1 point in 2004. Obama won it by a substantial margin—about 15 points. Bush won Nevada by 2 points in 2004. Obama won it by about 13 points.

Virginia has been trending blue since 2001, when Mark Warner was elected governor. In 2004, John Kerry won the Washington suburbs of Arlington, Alexandria, and Fairfax, but still lost the state to Bush, 45 to 54 percent. The next year, another Democrat, Tim Kaine, succeeded Warner. And the year after that, voters replaced incumbent Republican senator George Allen with Democrat Jim Webb in a contest decided by just a few thousand votes. In 2008 Virginia went totally blue. It handed the Democrats as many as three more House seats, replaced retiring Republican senator John Warner with Mark Warner (no relation) by a vote of two-to-one, and swung for Obama by a margin of 5.5 points. Virginia's electoral votes went for a Democrat for the first time since 1964.

The two major surprises on our new map are North Carolina and Indiana. Bush won North Carolina by 12 points in 2004. This year Obama erased that margin and won by a couple tenths of a point. It's the first time since 1976 that North Carolina has voted for a Democratic president. In Indiana the swing toward Obama was even more pronounced. Bush won there by a huge margin of 22 points in 2004. Obama made up all of that ground, eking out a victory of about a point. No Democrat had won Indiana since 1964.

If I were Obama strategist David Axelrod, I'd—well, I'd probably be exhausted right now. But I'd also make sure that President-elect Obama spends the next four years visiting North Carolina, Indiana, Virginia, Ohio, and Florida. He needs to deepen his support in all five states. And I'd also make sure Obama visits Missouri, where at this writing it appears he barely lost; Montana, where he lost by 2.5 points; and Georgia, where he lost by 5.5 points. If Obama holds all the states he won this year and adds those three to his column in 2012, he'll be reelected in a landslide. That's a big "if," of course. The key is a successful first term.

Where does this leave the Republicans? In deep trouble. The GOP is increasingly confined to Appalachia, the South, and the Great Plains. When the next Congress convenes in 2009, there won't be a single House Republican from New England. The GOP is doing only a little better in the mid-Atlantic. There will be only three Republican congressmen in New York's 29-member delegation in the next Congress. Only a third of Pennsylvania's delegation will be Republican—about the same proportion as in New Jersey. There will be a single Republican in Maryland's eight-man delegation. The Rust Belt is hostile territory, too. So are the Mountain West and the Pacific Coast. The GOP is like the central character in Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone." It's on its own, no direction home.

The Republicans are in demographic trouble. When you look at the ethnic composition of Obama's coalition, you see that it's kind of a mini-America. About two-thirds of Obama's supporters are white and a third minorities. The Republican coalition, by contrast, is white, male, and old. There's the first problem. Overall, Obama may have lost the white vote (while still doing better than Kerry did), but in 2008 whites (not counting Hispanics, per Census convention) made up the smallest proportion of the electorate since the start of exit polling. Obama scored tremendous victories among minorities. He won more than 90 percent of the black vote. He won the Hispanic vote by a two-to-one margin. He won the Asian vote by a similar margin.

Then there are the young. Voters under 30 turned out in only slightly higher numbers than they did in 2004, but they overwhelmingly backed Obama, 68 percent to 30. A successful Obama presidency could lock these voters into the Democratic column for a long, long time.

The most striking divide in 2008 is between rural voters and metropolitan voters. Rural voters back the Republican party overwhelmingly. The problem is that there aren't many of them—and there are fewer all the time. It's the metropolitan voters, the voters who live in cities or suburbs or exurbs, who are growing. And these voters are trending Democratic. Obama won the Philadelphia suburbs, the Washington, D.C., suburbs, the Chicago suburbs in Illinois and Indiana, the Denver suburbs, the suburban counties that make up the Research Triangle in North Carolina, and many more. He won the Orlando suburbs by 20 points. Disney World is Obama country.

Suburbs and exurbs are the most dynamic, fastest-growing places in the country. They are future-oriented. Republicans win when they build out from their rural base and gain support in the exurbs and suburbs. That's how Bush won in 2004. But in Bush's second term, things went awry. The suburban voters abandoned the GOP for the Democrats. The exurbs became volatile battlegrounds. And the GOP was left a minority party.

I think of places like Loudoun County, a northern Virginia exurb. Bush won Loudoun County by 12 points in 2004. In 2008, Obama won Loudoun by 6 points. For the GOP to have a future, it has to reverse that 18-point swing. Otherwise, Republicans better start praying for rain. ♦

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The Worst Case Scenario

The economic consequences of hope and change.

BY IRWIN M. STELZER

What will Barack Obama's sweeping victory mean for the U.S. economy? Here are a few guesses.

First, the president-elect meant it when he promised to redistribute income from families earning more than $250,000 per year to those earning $50,000 or less. Taxes on the richer families will go up to fund checks that will be mailed to the lower earners who now pay no income taxes (though they do pay Social Security taxes).

The worry is that congressional Democrats will persuade the new president to lower the $250,000 cutoff point to the $150,000 his vice president in waiting, Joe Biden, favors. Some of Obama's advisers are passing the word that he will hold the line at $250,000 and, moreover, won't risk exacerbating the recession by upsetting the wealth-creating small business sector with an immediate tax increase. Instead, he will simply allow the Bush tax cuts to expire at the end of 2010, returning taxes on high earners to the levels prevailing during the Clinton years. So, too, with inheritance taxes: They will go up in 2010 to something like the pre-Bush levels, perhaps with a bit more forgiveness for those passing on modest inheritances or small businesses. In the end, it will cost high earners more to live and more to die in 2011. Plan accordingly.

But taxes are only one area of concern to the business community. The supposedly conservative Bush administration has handed Obama significant control over the commanding heights of the economy. The new president inherits ownership of parts of most major banks, insurance companies, and other financial institutions, and has the funds needed to extend government ownership into other sectors of the economy. There is little doubt that he will use that control to restrict executive salaries, direct funds to homeowners behind in their mortgage payments, pressure banks to lend to constituencies he and his congressional allies deem worthy, and otherwise exercise more control over the allocation of the nation's capital resources than any of his predecessors was able to do, with the exception of Franklin Roosevelt during World War II.

The supposedly conservative Bush administration has handed Obama significant control over the commanding heights of the economy. The new president inherits ownership of parts of most major banks, insurance companies, and other financial institutions and can extend government ownership into other sectors.

Won't President Obama be constrained by the huge budget deficits he will face? Not entirely. Many items on his wish list don't require the direct expenditure of government money. A more-than-willing Congress will enable him to redeem his pledge to the trade unions to push through legislation to eliminate the secret ballot in union-recognition elections. The Environmental Protection Agency probably does not need new legislation to change the rules on carbon emissions so that Obama can achieve his goal of making new coal-fired generation plants totally uneconomic. The Federal Communications Commission can impose so-called "fairness" rules that make it more difficult for the largely conservative talk radio stations to challenge his government's policies. The Food and Drug Administration can make it difficult if not impossible for pharmaceutical companies to gain permission to market new drugs that the industry's critics contend are "merely" improvements on existing drugs, or are not sufficiently efficacious in the eyes of regulators. In short, Obama can obtain large portions of his agenda without asking Congress for new funding.

Certain sectors are most likely to see major changes. Housing will be the first in line. The government has placed the two giant mortgage writers, Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, in "conservatorship." There is general agreement that the hybrid structure of the past—with private shareholders, but an implicit government guarantee of Freddie and Fannie's debt, in return for encouraging home ownership among lower earners—is dysfunctional. There is no chance that Obama will try to privatize these organizations, which back something like three out of every four mortgages written in America. Even Federal Reserve Board chairman Ben Bernanke, not exactly a raving socialist, says there is a role for government to play in the mortgage and housing markets. Best guess is that Freddie and Fannie will be revived in some form, with a specific mandate to do more of what caused much of the mess we

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are now in—make loans to potential homeowners who will have difficulty meeting even the generous mortgage terms that will be on offer.

Then there is the energy sector. Obama meant it when he said that he would make carbon emissions so expensive that any electric utility attempting to build a coal-burning generator would be bankrupted. Biden was more direct—"No coal plants here in America." Add to that the "no new nukes" implicit in Obama's refusal to fund nuclear waste facilities, and the "no offshore drilling" implicit in the terms House speaker Nancy Pelosi will insert in any legislation on that subject, and it will soon be apparent that America will not have sufficient supplies of energy to fuel its economy, especially when a recovery takes hold.

Renewables, heavily subsidized, will add a tiny bit to supplies, but if Obama is to avoid watching oil imports soar he will have to do what Democrats since the days of Jimmy Carter have always wanted to do: ration the use of energy. Not with coupon books, but by increasing fuel-efficiency standards that will shrink the size of cars to European dimensions; rigidly enforcing rules that mandate the use of ugly, unsafe light bulbs; mandating expensive efficiency standards for new appliances, and so on.

By the end of his first term, the Obama administration will be exercising significant control over the allocation of bank credit, and similar if less overt control over the allocation of the nation's energy resources. The financial services sector will be crawling with regulators determined to reduce risk-taking. The rich will be paying higher taxes—no problem for billionaires such as Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, but a big deterrent to the establishment of new businesses. The trade unions will be recovering much of the ground they lost when the muscle-based industries gave way to intelligence-based industries. Americans will be driving smaller, less safe cars, and reading by dimmer bulbs. And—here's the most important part—an economic recovery will be underway.

That recovery will come sometime before Barack Obama begins his campaign for reelection. Will it be as vigorous as it might have been in the absence of more intrusive government? Perhaps not. But even an anemic recovery, especially when judged against the current recession, will allow voters to answer in the affirmative the question Ronald Reagan famously put to Jimmy Carter in 1980—"Are you better off than you were four years ago?" As Obama's likely opponent, Sarah Palin, might put it in a moment of candor, "You betcha." Voters will be comparing the economy Obama inherited with the one over which he is presiding, not with the might-have-been condition resulting from a McCain presidency. On to 2016, which might be a different story. ♦

A Guide to Elite Opinion

California's Prop. 8, Alaska's governor, and other abominations. BY JEFFREY BELL

In times like these, when conservatives are licking their wounds and trying to figure out what comes next, a helpful framework exists. It starts with a simple, self-evident fact: There is such a thing as elite opinion that is not the same as popular opinion.

Sometimes elite opinion is honestly of two minds, and has a vigorous internal debate that, in a republic like ours, winds up going to popular opinion for resolution. The first two contested elections in the United States, the close Adams-Jefferson elections of 1796 and 1800, exemplify this.

At other times, elites in a democracy have a tendency to get overly bound up with social status and careerism, and there is a premium on conformity. Having the right views, and the right way of expressing such views, becomes an emblem of elite status and a harbinger of career advancement. More and more issues become "not debatable." At such times, elite opinion is likely to see itself as self-evidently superior to popular opinion, and its role toward popular opinion as—shall we say—educative.

By the Friday after the election, what had happened in California had become a little too awkward for elite opinion to ignore. It was not so much that Proposition 8—writing marriage between a man and a woman into the state constitution, over the vehement objections of the California Supreme Court, the Republican governor, the Democratic legislature, Senator Barack Obama, and every editorial page and opinion writer imaginable—had passed. With similar results the same day in Florida and Arizona, the scoreboard in popular referenda on such amendments is now Marriage 30, Same Sex Marriage 0. It was the fact that in the most socially liberal state in the country, whites had voted (narrowly) against the amendment, Hispanics narrowly for, and black voters overwhelmingly for the traditional definition of marriage. Amazingly, Los Angeles County, which chose Obama over McCain 69 percent to 29 percent, supported Proposition 8, with black voters in crime-rid-

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den South Los Angeles neighborhoods like Compton voting strongly in favor, while Beverly Hills, Westwood, and Pacific Palisades were tolerantly and disdainfully against.

So elite opinion makers had to say something about these black voters. The accounts I saw said two things: Many blacks are bigoted against gays, and the pro-Proposition 8 forces got to California's black pastors. In other words, the anti-same-sex-marriage black voters are bigoted, they are sheep, or most likely some combination of the two. No other analysis offered—or needed.

I suspect the reality of this vote, once elite opinion's multiple stereotypes of black voters are set aside, has more to do with the aspirational nature of American values politics and of our social issues in general. It is why, no matter how hedonistic and promiscuous our mass culture gets, social issues show zero sign of disappearing from American politics the way they have from those of Western Europe and Japan.

American voters, and not just white voters in red states, still believe they have not just the right but the democratic obligation to set standards for their communities. They remain far from ready to take at face value the assurances of judicial, media, and academic elites on how things must be, however unanimous these elites appear to be. Socially conservative Americans, black and white, regret and (my sense is) are deeply self-critical of their own frequent failure to overcome the surrounding culture and live up to the standards they believe in. But to them it does not follow that the standards should no longer exist, or (in the openly stated, nearly unanimous view of elite opinion) should no longer even be debated in politics.

This misunderstanding is at the heart of the single biggest blunder in the ongoing war against Sarah Palin. Journalistic elites were seemingly persuaded that their outing of the unwed pregnancy of Bristol Palin would be a "gotcha" moment, one that very likely would drive Sarah Palin from the race or at the very least make her a negligible force in Middle America. Instead, millions of voters were electrified in admiration, realizing that they were in the presence of a politician who, even in the midst of a humiliating family crisis, was committed to living her beliefs rather than simply paying them lip service.

The McCain-Palin campaign was just the beginning of the full assault against Sarah Palin, which will pursue her to Alaska and continue unabated until she is destroyed or withdraws from politics. Until that moment, Palin and her allies will see no end to reports that she believes Africa is a country, doesn't know what countries are in NAFTA, and angled to run for vice president because she always wanted to go on a shopping spree at Neiman Marcus.

American voters, and not just white voters in red states, still believe they have not just the right but the democratic obligation to set standards for their communities. They remain far from ready to take at face value the assurances of judicial, media, and academic elites on how things must be.

The last thing conservatives should do is let themselves be drawn into a debate over her campaign, how it was handled, and whether it was a net plus or net minus for John McCain. In the end people's judgment about that won't matter unless Palin internalizes the attacks and retreats from national politics. So far she seems unlikely to draw such a conclusion, which is very worrisome to elite opinion.

The reason elite opinion makers are set on destroying her is fear. They sense that like Ronald Reagan, and unlike, say, Mitt Romney or Tim Pawlenty, she really, genuinely doesn't care what they think, and for that reason is willing and able to go over their heads and make a strong, direct appeal to voters. Some of them may even remember that Ronald Reagan's negatives were as high as his positives in the polls as late as 10 days before he carried 44 states in 1980.

This is a time when elite opinion, including its conservative wing, is unanimous in wanting American politics to become a value-free zone in the image of Western Europe. A refusal to defer to elite opinion, the confidence that it can be overcome, may be the single most important quality in conservative politics.

Apart from this willingness to go against elite opinion, conservatives should stop asking themselves who, if anyone, is the new Reagan. That way lies madness. So far there isn't another Ronald Reagan. There may never be. Besides, most people (including his advisers) didn't know Ronald Reagan was Ronald Reagan until he was out of office.

What they should ask themselves instead is, can there be a conservative Barack Obama? That is, can a conservative presidential candidate be a dynamic speaker, draw huge crowds, go viral on the Internet, and launch a populist money machine capable of playing in the same league with Obama himself? (If not, if this proves to be something unique to the left, American conservatism may have a rather limited future.)

One of the key characteristics of elite opinion, particularly at times like the present when it has become so unanimous that it has forgotten what it is to have a real debate, is repetition of the claim that some issues are settled, or no longer subject to serious debate. The end of the debate on global warming. The end of the Reagan era. The end of neoconservatism. The end of social conservatism. The end of Sarah Palin.

The one thing to be sure of is that as long as elite opinion keeps declaring that something has ended, it hasn't ended yet. ♦

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What Happens in Vegas . . .

Is reported here: A McCain campaign postmortem.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

Las Vegas

As she dealt one losing hand after another at Mandalay Bay's $10 blackjack tables early Wednesday evening, Trisha, a chatty dealer from Bloomington, Minnesota, changed the subject from cards to Barack Obama.

"Ohhhh ya," she said in a sing-songy northern plains accent, "me and my girlfriend are going to go to the Inauguration. It's so exciting. Did you watch that speech? Oh my God! Do you think he just made that all up as he went along? Oh my God! He's amazing!"

A businessman from Nashville, in town for a convention, rolled his eyes. "That's how Obama won," he whispered. The dealer did not hear him.

"It's just so exciting," she said, preparing to go on.

"Let's not talk about it," said Michael Goldfarb, taking a long sip from his Johnnie Walker Black on the rocks.

Another guy at the table agreed. "It's blackjack."

Until 18 hours earlier, Goldfarb had talked about little besides Barack Obama for a year. The brash Princeton graduate, a once and future colleague at this magazine, had served as the deputy communications director for McCain's campaign. In that capacity he had been responsible for much of the aggressive response to reporters McCain staffers regarded as "in the tank" for Obama. He didn't make many friends in the media. He doesn't care.

Goldfarb made the five-hour post-election road trip to Vegas from Phoenix with two other youthful campaign veterans, Brian Rogers, who directed the campaign's rapid response, and Joe Pounder, who, as one of his colleagues put it, "actually did all of the work." They were hoping to leave the campaign behind. They couldn't.

Trisha turned over one hand after another of spirit-crushing cards. "Pounder's taking some losses," said Rogers. "Like Virginia or Nevada?" Goldfarb wondered.

I explained to Trisha that Goldfarb, Rogers, and Pounder had worked for McCain and had driven up from the McCain concession speech in Phoenix. She apologized for their continued bad luck, and someone asked if she thought she might be able to turn it around. She paused before answering.

"Yes, we can."

For these three McCain communicators, it had been a long 24 hours. They arrived in Phoenix on Monday and, after a leisurely dinner with some others on the staff, they awoke Tuesday and made several hours' worth of get-out-the-vote calls. It wasn't glamorous duty. But Election Days are the most painful days for campaign staff, who take turns fighting off anxiety and boredom.

By early afternoon, many on the campaign had learned that the first round of exit polls was bad. The loss they had anticipated was slowly becoming a reality.

McCain spoke at 11:15 P.M. Several people on his staff had lingered a bit too long at a private reception for staff and major supporters and had to scramble to get to the back lawn of the Biltmore Hotel for McCain's speech. The Secret Service had set up an elaborate screening process, and only some staffers had the special pin that allowed them to bypass it. Goldfarb assured the agent—the proverbial finger in the dike—that a couple of us following him were okay to get in. But our number grew quickly from two or three to two or three dozen. As others waited before the magnetometer, we clambered over some large metal boxes meant to keep us out and dashed toward the lawn.

McCain opened his remarks by acknowledging that the American people had spoken with their votes. And he smiled that slightly impish grin as he noted that they had spoken clearly. McCain's staff wore their disbelief—that their man had lost, that this all-consuming race was over—on their faces. Several of them nodded enthusiastically and exchanged knowing looks when McCain mentioned the "challenges" his campaign had faced in the current political climate.

A few young women in the crowd began to weep. One staffer close to the stage let out sobs so loud that she drew looks from those around her, concerned that her crying might have been audible to McCain.

McCain didn't seem to notice. His speech was magnificent, and he delivered it well:

> I urge all Americans who supported me to join me in not just congratulating him but offering our next president our good will and earnest effort to find ways to come together, to find the necessary compromises, to bridge our differences, and help restore prosperity, defend our security in a dangerous world, and leave our children and grandchildren a stronger better country than we inherited. Whatever our differences, we are fellow Americans. And please believe me when I say no association has ever meant more to me than that.

After the speech, many of those on his staff gathered at a private VIP party in one of the Arizona Biltmore's lush green courtyards. There was a bar featuring a wide array of hard liquor and beer products from the Budweiser family, the company responsible for Cindy McCain's fortune. An adjoining room inside the resort featured a picked-over assortment of appetizers and desserts.

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In the courtyard, two oversized flat-panel televisions had been set up for watching returns, and in front of each one, ultra-comfortable resort chairs surrounded large fire bowls bringing welcome heat in the chilly desert night.

Jill Hazelbaker, McCain's exceedingly helpful communications director, sat in front of one television with some colleagues and her brother, who had joined her for the big night. Many of those on the communications staff she directed stood near the fire, watching panelists on Fox News chew over the results. The staff discussed surprising results (Indiana and North Carolina were too close to call), wondered about future job prospects (lobbying, statewide races in 2010, and, yes, the 2012 presidential campaigns), and evaluated the reporters covering McCain and Obama (NBC's Kelly O'Donnell, Reuters's Steve Holland, and the *Chicago Tribune*'s Jill Zuckman were later mentioned as the most accurate and objective).

At one point, Goldfarb approached the television and pretended to throw a beer bottle at a smug-looking Jesse Jackson on the screen, and someone shouted at him, "Who's number two? Who's number two?" The group exploded in laughter.

In an appearance with Rick Sanchez on CNN in the final days of the campaign, Goldfarb had accused Obama of hanging out with anti-American and anti-Semitic figures and cited PLO sympathizer Rashid Khalidi as an example. Sanchez wanted more.

> *Sanchez*: Can you name one other person besides Khalidi who he hangs around who is anti-Semitic?
> *Goldfarb*: Yes, he pals around with William Ayers who is an unrepentant domestic terrorist.
> *Sanchez*: No, no, the question I asked you is can you name one other person who he hangs around with who is anti-Semitic? Because that is what you said.
> *Goldfarb*: Look, we all know there are people who Barack Obama has been in hot water—
> *Sanchez*: Michael, I asked you to name one person. One.
> *Goldfarb*: Rick, we both—
> *Sanchez*: You said he hangs around with people who are anti-Semitic. Okay. We got Khalidi on the table. Give me number two. Who's the other anti-Semitic person that he hangs around with that we quote, "All know about"?
> *Goldfarb*: Rick, we both know who number two is.
> *Sanchez*: Who? Would you tell us?
> *Goldfarb*: No, Rick, I think we all know who we're talking about here.
> *Sanchez*: Somebody who is anti-Semitic that he hangs around with?
> *Goldfarb*: Absolutely.
> *Sanchez*: Well, say it.
> *Goldfarb*: I think we all know who we are talking about, Rick.

Goldfarb had done the interview from a studio at the campaign headquarters in Crystal City, in suburban Virginia outside Washington, D.C. His exchange rocketed around the Internet and quickly became a favorite of left-wing bloggers—who alternately accused him of playing dirty by making charges he couldn't back up and wimping out by refusing to name a second anti-Semite. Others wondered whom Goldfarb was talking about.

If it wasn't obvious to them, the identity of "number two" was clear to those inside McCain headquarters: Reverend Jeremiah Wright. McCain had pledged last spring that he wouldn't use Wright's hate-filled sermons against Obama, who had listened to them for 20 years in the pews of Wright's church. But virtually no one on McCain's staff agreed with the candidate's restraint. Goldfarb had joked before the appearance that he was going to "go rogue" and bring up Wright's name in the interview. He didn't—barely—thereby preserving his job at the cost of looking a bit ridiculous. But when he walked into the campaign's common area after his exchange with Sanchez, his colleagues gave him a standing ovation.

The day after McCain's loss, these three McCain aides could not get beyond the campaign—in large part because of the frenzied postelection finger-pointing among their bosses. For months, McCain's staff received emailed "news alerts" with virtually every mention of the candidate or the campaign—receiving sometimes hundreds in an hour. After McCain's concession speech, the alerts slowed to a trickle. But as we drove from Phoenix to Las Vegas in a rented Jeep Commander, the campaign-issued BlackBerries began to buzz once again. By the time we were eating steak tartare at Stripsteak in Mandalay Bay, those emails were coming quickly.

On Wednesday afternoon, Carl Cameron had reported on Fox News that a McCain adviser had been "briefly fired" in the waning days of the campaign. That evening, on the *O'Reilly Factor*, Cameron reported that the aide was Randy Scheunemann, McCain's top foreign policy adviser and the stand-in for Joe Biden in Sarah Palin's debate rehearsals. Soon, other news outlets were reporting that Scheunemann had been fired, for excess of zeal in defending Palin against sniping by other staffers. Goldfarb, like many on the staff, understood that Scheunemann had not in fact been fired. Goldfarb excused himself from dinner to talk to reporters and correct the misimpressions. He was on the phone and on his BlackBerry for much of the night.

Earlier that evening, the sun was setting as we arrived in Las Vegas. The lights of the strip grew brighter against the darkening skies. We had been listening to classic rock for the entire drive, and as we prepared to exit onto Tropicana Avenue, a familiar song blared from the speakers. "*Nah, nah—nah, nah, nah, nah—Hey, hey, hey—Goodbye*."

I asked the McCain aides whether this—the arrival in Las Vegas and the odd timing of such an appropriate song—might signify that their campaign was finally done. A couple of chuckles—no real response.

No one was talking much, other than to wonder whether the Garmin nüvi, programmed just to direct us to Las Vegas, would take us to the hotel on the strip. After a few minutes passed in silence, Rogers, who was driving, was reflective.

"Isn't politics crazy? You work straight for two years nonstop and then you wake up one day and it's all over."

Or, given the postelection squabbling among campaign staffers, maybe not. ♦

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Bloomberg's Bombast

New York's mayor buys himself a third term.

BY FRED SIEGEL

The folks over at *Newsweek* have a sly sense of humor. They put New York mayor Michael Bloomberg on the cover of their November 3 issue and let him dispense fiscal advice to the next president. In the article, Bloomberg, who has presided over record levels of spending and debt increases, chastised "Washington" for putting us in a hole by "spending with reckless abandon for years." The lofty Bloomberg told *Newsweek*'s readers, "Programs that don't pass a cost-benefit analysis, that have been driven by politics rather than economics, should be cut."

This is excellent advice. But Bloomberg has never taken it. One of the few things economists agree on, for example, is that subsidized sports stadia are a bad investment of public funds. They are also one of Bloomberg's passions. The mayor tried and failed to subsidize a West Side football stadium to the tune of roughly $600 million, but succeeded in sending similar sums toward his developer friend Bruce Ratner for a massive Brooklyn project, centered on a basketball arena, now stalled, for which there was no demand. He subsidized the Mets' new home, Citi Field, and, through direct and indirect subsidies—some of which are now under New York state and congressional investigation—Bloomberg has been paying for the construction of George Steinbrenner's new Yankee Stadium. The costs to the city so far are $458 million (with tax breaks provided to the two teams for the stadium projects further costing the city an estimated $480 million in revenue). Yet, the mayor tells *Newsweek*'s readers that national infrastructure projects have to be funded "strictly on merit."

The man who has helped preside over the gigantic hole at Ground Zero—where rebuilding is many years behind schedule and massively over budget—nonetheless insisted in *Newsweek* that the federal government hold the states and the cities "accountable for building on time and on budget."

Newsweek's offices are in New York City; shouldn't Bloomberg's assertions have raised a few red flags? But on he went. The mayor, who has nearly doubled spending on education with no known return on the investment other than a vastly expanded PR staff and chaos in repeatedly reorganized schools, talked about "our [educational] success in New York." Did *Newsweek* notice that the additional $9 billion he's spent on education hasn't shown up in any improvements on national tests?

The article closed with Bloomberg's heartfelt advice to the next president to "demonstrate that your talk of bipartisanship is not just talk." Here his deeds have generally been as good as his words. He has been willing to spend vast sums to buy support in both parties to achieve the greater glory of Bloomberg. He has the money, resources, and advisers to be his own party and is less bipartisan than he is an alternative political pole, one that offers Michael Bloomberg as the sole program.

A knockoff of Berlusconi, he's a man with a media empire who has dedicated his efforts to saving not his city or country but himself from the boredom of buying influence by merely giving away pieces of his fortune. A lifelong Democrat, he suddenly became a Republican in order to run for mayor in 2001. He later left the GOP to become an independent, and his staff is now exploring the chances of his running as a Democrat for reelection in 2009.

Whatever his formal identification, Bloomberg is desperate to remain on the national stage. For the past year, he ran a shadow campaign for national office. He toured the country and ran ads touting his educational "achievements" to boost the idea that he was the indispensable man for America's future. Long before *Newsweek* turned itself into his doormat, he had garnered adoring articles in *Esquire*, *Vanity Fair*, and *GQ* explaining how he had risen above the ordinary categories of politics to accomplish extraordinary fiscal and educational feats. But Bloomberg, whose billions make it possible to insert himself into any campaign at almost any time, saw his presidential and vice-presidential hopes dashed. He has been reduced to buying a third term as mayor of New York.

Until a few weeks ago New York had a term-limits law—twice ratified by public referenda—that limited the mayor and the city council to eight years in office. Bloomberg could have held a referendum on overturn-

A knockoff of Berlusconi, he's a man with a media empire who has dedicated his efforts to saving not his city or country but himself from the boredom of buying influence by merely giving away pieces of his fortune. His presidential hopes dashed, he has been reduced to running for a third term.

Fred Siegel is writing a history of modern American liberalism.

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ing them—a referendum he was very likely to win given his 70 percent approval rating. But there were dangers in taking the democratic path. The referendum would have been scheduled for February 2009, and, as Baruch College's Doug Muzzio notes, voters are likely to be hit before then by hikes in their property taxes, water bills, and subway fares. The tough times, though softened for the political class by Bloomberg's deep pockets, might have produced only a narrow victory unbefitting a Great Man. Instead, operating on the basis of ambiguities in the city charter, Bloomberg strong-armed the city council into overturning term-limits: threatening to cut off funds to their districts and stop his "anonymous" donations to the nonprofits they count on to get out the vote if they opposed his plan.

Bloomberg—who, according to some sources, has convinced himself that he's doing the public a favor by refusing to get out of the limelight—expected, quite reasonably, an easy ride from the oft-intimidated, oft-bought, scandal-ridden city council. When it came to the question of how the horses hauling Central Park carriages were being treated, the city council held 13 hearings. Term limits were rammed through after just two days of "deliberation."

The trouble was that in allowing Bloomberg to run for a third term, the council members were also voting a third term for themselves, and this velvet coup ran into unexpected public opposition. *Newsweek's* hero was compared to Putin, Hugo Chávez, and Tony Soprano by respected journalists, and the council, which is almost always nearly unanimous in votes, in the end backed Bloomberg by a count of only 29-22.

While the path may be clear for Bloomberg's third term, there remains the question of whether he will serve it out? City Hall, notes political consultant Jerry Skurnick, is a poor consolation prize for someone who believes he's entitled to a place on the national or international stage. During his shadow presidential campaign, "Mayor Mike" repeatedly pantomimed non-denial denials about his intentions. The *Newsweek* article set off a similar display of mummery—complete with nods and winks—about how he wasn't looking for a spot in an Obama or McCain administration.

For the time being Bloomberg, who presided over the great spending spree of the last few years, has been reduced to insisting that only a genius like himself can save Gotham from the fiscal dangers imposed by Wall Street's collapse (and his own maladministration). This seems odd since the man who spoke of New York as "the luxury product" has shown no interest in nurturing small businesses, which are essential for regenerating the economy and have been squeezed hard by his administration's search for revenue. Though *Newsweek* might not have noticed it, there was a net middle-class out-migration from New York City even in the midst of the late lamented boom.

For the last five years, while Bloomberg has been playing a golden tuba as the sky was raining Wall Street money, there was little point in criticizing a man whose unprecedented concentration of personal and political power made him as much feared as admired. But the skepticism and even open hostility elicited by his power grab has, for the moment, cracked his carapace of invulnerability. If the city is lucky, this will be the beginning of a 2009 mayoral campaign that will have to deal with a New York shorn of Wall Street as we once knew it. Who knows, *Newsweek* might actually take note of the city where its editorial offices are located and cover Bloomberg as if he were something less than the sum of his PR clips and bank accounts. ♦

THOMAS FLUHARTY

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Defining Jew-Hatred Down

The curious response to Ahmadinejad at the U.N.

BY MATTHIAS KÜNTZEL

It is a topsy-turvy world: At the United Nations—an organization born out of the struggle against Nazi Germany and intended to embody the lessons of the Holocaust—a head of state openly spouts anti-Semitic propaganda in an address before the General Assembly. Granted, he takes the trouble to denounce "Zionists" and avoid the word "Jew," but this dodge is transparent to any student of the Nazis. His speech is greeted with acclaim, and neither the U.N. secretary general nor any Western head of government bothers to object. The media are mostly silent.

It happened on September 23, and the speaker was Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. A familiar figure at the U.N., Ahmadinejad has a history of using his turn at the rostrum to sermonize about his yearning for the return of the Shia messiah. This time, he went further, drawing inspiration also from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

The Zionists, he told the assembly, are the eternal enemy of "the dignity, integrity and rights of the American and European people" (this is the English translation of his remarks on the U.N. website). Although they are few in number, the Zionists "have been dominating an important portion of the financial and monetary centers as well as the political decision-making centers of some European countries and the United States in a deceitful, complex and furtive manner."

Matthias Küntzel, a Hamburg-based political scientist, is the author most recently of Jihad and Jew-Hatred: Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11.

Indeed, so influential are the Zionists around the world that even "some presidential or premier nominees in some big countries have to visit these people, take part in their gatherings, swear allegiance and commitment to their interests in order to attain financial or media support." In particular, even "the great people of America and various nations of Europe" are caught in the clutches of Jewish power: They "need to obey the demands and wishes of a small number of acquisitive and invasive people. These nations are spending their dignity and resources on the crimes and occupations and the threats of the Zionist network against their will."

Yet liberation is near. "Today," according to Ahmadinejad, "the Zionist regime is on a definite slope to collapse. There is no way for it to get out of the cesspool created by itself and its supporters."

For Ahmadinejad, of course, such talk is nothing new. Addressing the international Holocaust deniers' conference in Tehran in December 2006, he declared (in a speech translated by the Middle East Media Research Institute, MEMRI) that "the Zionist regime will be wiped out, and humanity will be liberated"—freed, that is, from the "acquisitive and invasive" minority he "outed" in New York as the real power behind Western governments. The sentiment is not so far from that expressed in a Nazi directive of 1943: "This war will end with anti-Semitic world revolution and with the extermination of Jewry throughout the world, both of which are the precondition for an enduring peace." Just as Hitler's utopia, his "German peace," required the extermination of the Jews, so the Iranian leadership's "Islamic peace" is conditioned on the elimination of Israel.

Ahmadinejad's performance elicited applause from his audience and a warm embrace from the president of the General Assembly, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, a 75-year-old Catholic priest and holder of the Lenin Prize of the former Soviet Union. D'Escoto is a close friend of Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega, in whose government he served as foreign minister from 1979 to 1990. This is the same Ortega who, four weeks after the Tehran Holocaust deniers' conference, joined President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela in welcoming Ahmadinejad to Latin America as a "a president willing to join with the Nicaraguan people in the great battle against poverty."

Equally noteworthy was the lack of reaction to Ahmadinejad's U.N. performance in Western capitals—with three exceptions. The German and French foreign ministers criticized Ahmadinejad's "blatant anti-Semitism," and Barack Obama expressed disappointment that the Iranian president had been given "a platform to air his hateful and anti-Semitic views." Otherwise Ahmadinejad's misuse of the U.N. to spread anti-Semitic propaganda didn't even register as a provocation.

On September 23, the very day of his speech, Ahmadinejad was Larry King's guest on CNN. King offered the Iranian president an hour-long opportunity to hold forth as he pleased.

The next day, in an article for *Salon*, the Iran specialist Juan Cole of the University of Michigan took Obama to task for his comments on Ahmadinejad. Cole quoted a single sentence from the U.N. speech—one in which Ahmadinejad criticized the United States—while ignoring the anti-Semitic passages. "Larry King got at the true Ahmadinejad," Cole insisted, whereas Obama "fell into the trap of declining to make a distinction between anti-Zionist views and anti-Semitic ones."

Then on September 25, Ahma-

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dinejad visited the *New York Times*. In the interview published the next day, he rehearsed his anti-Semitic notions without protest from interviewer Neil MacFarquhar. "Zionism," Ahmadinejad explained, "is the root cause of insecurity and wars. . . . What commitment forces the U.S. government to victimize itself in support of a regime that is basically a criminal one?"

This was in striking contrast to the *Times*'s outrage in 2003 when Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia delivered an anti-Semitic speech. Back then the *Times* wrote:

> It is hard to know what is more alarming—a toxic statement of hatred of Jews by the Malaysian prime minister at an Islamic summit meeting this week or the unanimous applause it engendered from the kings, presidents and emirs in the audience.

Not only that, but the *Times* concluded its editorial with a sharp rebuke to the European Union:

> The European Union was asked to include a condemnation of Mr. Mahathir's speech in its statement yesterday ending its own summit meeting. It chose not to, adding a worry that anti-Semitism displays are being met with inexcusable nonchalance.

The *Times* is doing now what it so recently held to be "inexcusable."

Sixty-three years after Auschwitz, then, has anti-Semitism entered "acceptable" discourse? Or is the *New York Times* actually fooled by a rhetorical trick? Where Mahathir was crude enough to denounce the machinations of "the Jews," Ahmadinejad attacks only "the Zionists." He says, "Two thousand Zionists want to rule the world." He says "the Zionists" have for 60 years blackmailed "all Western governments." He says, "The Zionists have imposed themselves on a substantial portion of the banking, financial, cultural and media sectors." Perhaps this is why he is hailed as an anti-imperialist star.

But the Iranian president uses the term "Zionist" in precisely the way Hitler used the term "Jew": as the embodiment of evil. Even if the Iranian regime tolerates the presence of a Jewish community in Tehran, whoever holds Jews responsible for all the ills of the world—whether calling them "Judases" or "Zionists"—is propagating a potentially genocidal creed.

In fact, anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism have gone hand in hand for over 80 years, not only in the annals of Nazism but also in the intellectual foundations of the Iranian revolution.

In 1921, the future Nazi ideology chief Alfred Rosenberg published a book entitled *Zionism, Enemy of the State*. In 1925, Hitler likewise attacked Zionism in *Mein Kampf*, warning that "a Jewish state in Palestine" would only serve as an "organization centre for their international world-swindling, . . . a place of refuge for convicted scoundrels and a university for up-and-coming swindlers." Or does this reading of Hitler fall into Juan Cole's "trap of declining to make a distinction between anti-Zionist views and anti-Semitic ones"?

> The mullahs' regime disseminated the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' throughout the world. In 2005, an English edition of the 'Protocols' was displayed by Iranian booksellers at the Frankfurt Book Fair—the very year Khomeini's fervent admirer Ahmadinejad was elected president.

As a scholar who can read the writings of the Ayatollah Khomeini in the original, Cole is surely familiar with Khomeini's anti-Semitism. And yet he passes over this anti-Semitism in silence, just as he passed over the offensive passages of Ahmadinejad's speech. Up until the revolution of 1979, Khomeini was entirely open in his choice of words. "The Jews . . . wish to establish Jewish domination throughout the world," he wrote in 1970 in his major work, *Islamic Government*. "Since they are a cunning and resourceful group of people, I fear that . . . they may one day achieve their goal." In September 1977, Khomeini declared: "The Jews have grasped the world with both hands and are devouring it with an insatiable appetite, they are devouring America and have now turned their attention to Iran and still they are not satisfied." The quotation comes from an official compilation of Khomeini's works published in Tehran in 1995.

Starting in 1979, however, Khomeini substituted the word "Zionist" for "Jew," while leaving the fundamental anti-Semitism unchanged. The mullahs' regime disseminated the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* throughout the world. In 2005, an English edition of the *Protocols* was displayed by Iranian booksellers at the Frankfurt Book Fair—the very year Khomeini's fervent admirer Ahmadinejad was elected president.

Today, the anti-Semitism of the Nazis is espoused in Tehran with all the zeal that fuels religious war. As Ayatollah Nouri-Hamedani, one of the regime's leading religious authorities, declared in a statement published in 2005 by the official Iranian news agency, Fars (but quickly pulled from the Fars website, according to MEMRI): "One should fight the Jews and vanquish them so that the conditions for the advent of the Hidden Imam are met." What makes the Iranian nuclear program so dangerous is not the technology, but the religious and anti-Semitic mission that the regime would use it to pursue.

"Tehran . . . is pregnant with tragedies," Israeli president Shimon Peres told the U.N. General Assembly the day after Ahmadinejad's appearance. "The General Assembly and the Security Council bear responsibility to prevent agonies before they take place." And not only the General Assembly and the Security Council—but Larry King, the *New York Times*, and the rest of us as well. ♦

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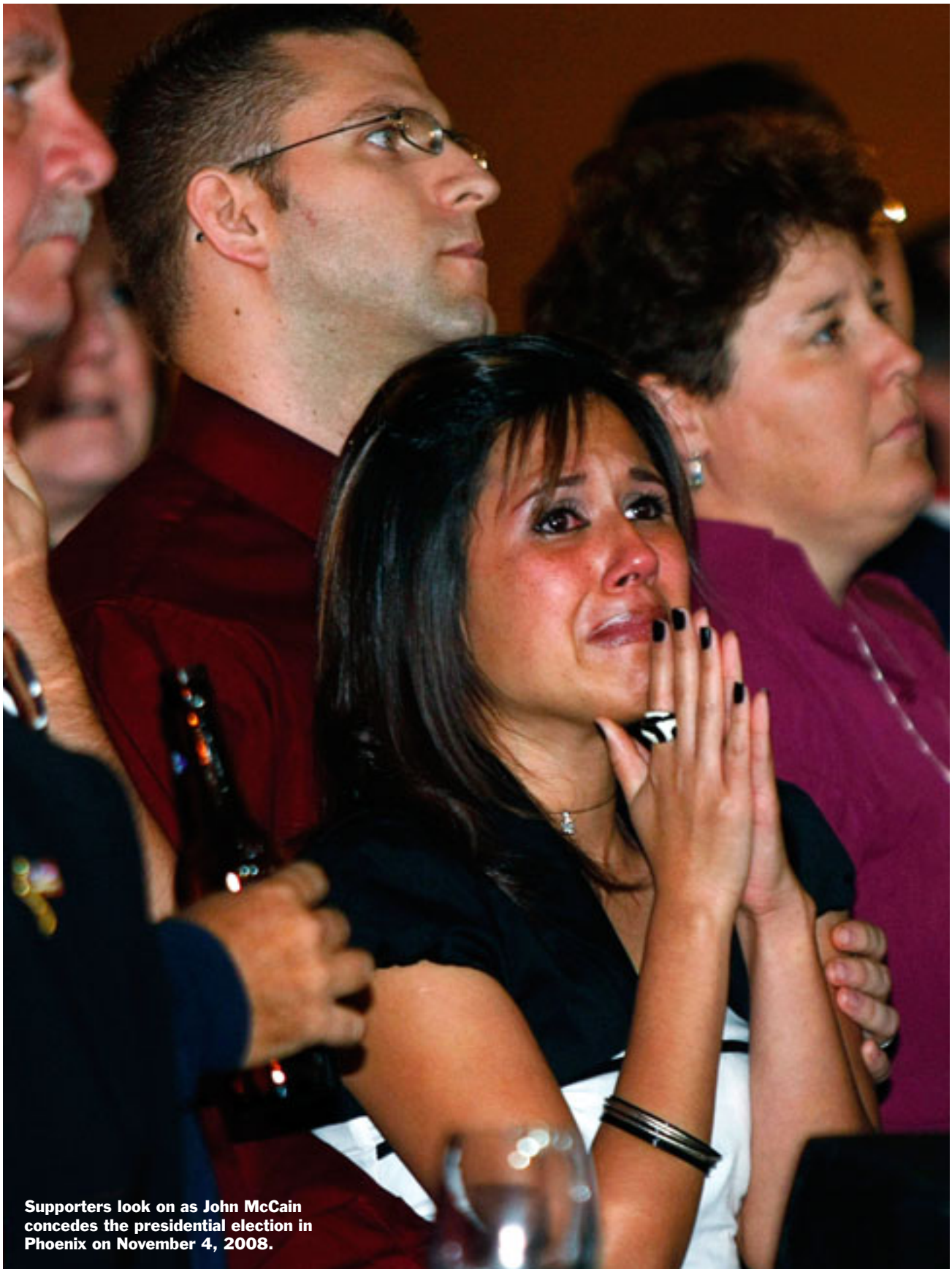

Supporters look on as John McCain concedes the presidential election in Phoenix on November 4, 2008.

REUTERS

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We Blew It

A look back in remorse on the conservative opportunity that was squandered

By P.J. O'Rourke

Let us bend over and kiss our ass goodbye. Our 28-year conservative opportunity to fix the moral and practical boundaries of government is gone—gone with the bear market and the Bear Stearns and the bear that's headed off to do you-know-what in the woods on our philosophy.

An entire generation has been born, grown up, and had families of its own since Ronald Reagan was elected. And where is the world we promised these children of the Conservative Age? Where is this land of freedom and responsibility, knowledge, opportunity, accomplishment, honor, truth, trust, and one boring hour each week spent in itchy clothes at church, synagogue, or mosque? It lies in ruins at our feet, as well it might, since we ourselves kicked the shining city upon a hill into dust and rubble. The progeny of the Reagan Revolution will live instead in the universe that revolves around Hyde Park.

Mind you, they won't live *in* Hyde Park. Those leafy precincts will be reserved for the micromanagers and macro-apparatchiks of liberalism—for Secretary of the Department of Peace Bill Ayers and Secretary of the Department of Fairness Bernardine Dohrn. The formerly independent citizens of our previously self-governed nation will live, as I said, *around* Hyde Park. They will make what homes they can in the physical, ethical, and intellectual slums of the South Side of Chicago.

The South Side of Chicago is what everyplace in America will be once the Democratic administration and filibuster-resistant Democratic Congress have tackled global warming, sustainability, green alternatives to coal and oil, subprime mortgage foreclosures, consumer protection, business oversight, financial regulation, health care reform, taxes on the "rich," and urban sprawl. The Democrats will have plenty of time to do all this because conservatism, if it is ever reborn, will not come again in the lifetime of anyone old enough to be rounded up by ACORN and shipped to the polling booths.

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None of this is the fault of the left. After the events of the 20th century—national socialism, international socialism, inter-species socialism from Earth First—anyone who is still on the left is obviously insane and not responsible for his or her actions. No, we on the right did it. The financial crisis that is hoisting us on our own petard is only the latest (if the last) of the petard hoistings that have issued from the hindquarters of our movement. We've had nearly three decades to educate the electorate about freedom, responsibility, and the evils of collectivism, and we responded by creating a big-city-public-school-system of a learning environment.

Liberalism had been running wild in the nation since the Great Depression. At the end of the Carter administration we had it cornered in one of its dreadful low-income housing projects or smelly public parks or some such place, and we held the Taser gun in our hand, pointed it at the beast's swollen gut, and didn't pull the trigger. Liberalism wasn't zapped and rolled away on a gurney and confined somewhere until it expired from natural causes such as natural law or natural rights.

In our preaching and our practice we neglected to convey the organic and universal nature of freedom. Thus we ensured our loss before we even began our winning streak. Barry Goldwater was an admirable and principled man. He took an admirably principled stand on states' rights. But he was dead wrong. Separate isn't equal. Ask a kid whose parents are divorced.

Since then modern conservatism has been plagued by the wrong friends and the wrong foes. The "Southern Strategy" was bequeathed to the Republican party by Richard Nixon—not a bad friend of conservatism but no friend at all. The Southern Strategy wasn't needed. Southern whites were on—begging the pardon of the Scopes trial jury—an evolutionary course toward becoming Republican. There's a joke in Arkansas about a candidate hustling votes in the country. The candidate asks a farmer how many children he has.

"I've got six sons," the farmer says.

"Are they all good little Democrats?" the candidate asks.

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"Well," the farmer says, "five of 'em are. But my oldest boy, he got to readin' . . . "

There was no need to piss off the entire black population of America to get Dixie's electoral votes. And despising cracker trash who have a laundry hamper full of bedsheets with eye-holes cut in them does not make a man a liberal.

Blacks used to poll Republican. They did so right up until Mrs. Roosevelt made some sympathetic noises in 1932. And her husband didn't even deliver on Eleanor's promises.

It's not hard to move a voting bloc. And it should be especially easy to move voters to the right. Sensible adults are conservative in most aspects of their private lives. If this weren't so, imagine driving on I-95: The majority of drivers are drunk, stoned, making out, or watching TV, while the rest are trying to calculate the size of their carbon footprints on the backs of Whole Foods receipts while negotiating lane changes.

People are even more conservative if they have children. Nobody with kids is a liberal, except maybe one pothead in Marin County. Everybody wants his or her children to respect freedom, exercise responsibility, be honest, get educated, have opportunities, and own a bunch of guns. (The last is optional and includes, but is not limited to, me, my friends in New Hampshire, and Sarah Palin.)

No Child Left Behind? What if they deserve to be left behind? What if they deserve a smack on the behind? A nationwide program to test whether kids are what? Stupid? You've got kids. Kids are stupid.

Reagan managed to reach out to blue collar whites. But there his reach stopped, leaving many people on our side, but barely knowing it. There are enough yarmulkes among the neocons to show that Jews are not immune to conservatism. Few practicing Catholics vote Democratic anymore except in Massachusetts where they put something in the communion wafers. When it comes to a full-on, hemp-wearing, kelp-eating, mandala-tatted, fool-coifed liberal with socks in sandals, I have never met a Muslim like that or a Chinese and very few Hispanics. No U.S. immigrants from the Indian subcontinent fill that bill (the odd charlatan yogi excepted), nor do immigrants from Africa, Eastern Europe, or East Asia. And Japanese tourists may go so far as socks in sandals, but their liberal nonsense stops at the ankles.

We have all of this going for us, worldwide. And yet we chose to deliver our sermons only to the faithful or the already converted. Of course the trailer park Protestants yell "Amen." If you were handling rattlesnakes and keeping dinosaurs for pets, would you vote for the party that gets money from PETA?

In how many ways did we fail conservatism? And who can count that high? Take just one example of our unconserved tendency to poke our noses into other people's business: abortion. Democracy—be it howsoever conservative—is a manifestation of the will of the people. We may argue with the people as a man may argue with his wife, but in the end we must submit to the fact of being married. Get a pro-life friend drunk to the truth-telling stage and ask him what happens if his 14-year-old gets knocked up. What if it's rape? Some people truly have the courage of their convictions. I don't know if I'm one of them. I might kill the baby. I *will* kill the boy.

The real message of the conservative pro-life position is that we're in favor of living. We consider people—with a few obvious exceptions—to be assets. Liberals consider people to be nuisances. People are always needing more government resources to feed, house, and clothe them and to pick up the trash around their FEMA trailers and to make sure their self-esteem is high enough to join community organizers lobbying for more government resources.

If the citizenry insists that abortion remain legal—and, in a passive and conflicted way, the citizenry seems to be doing so—then give the issue a rest. Meanwhile we can, with the public's blessing, refuse to spend taxpayers' money on killing, circumscribe the timing and method of taking a human life, make sure parental consent is obtained when underage girls are involved, and tar and feather teenage boys and run them out of town on a rail. The law cannot be made identical with morality. Scan the list of the Ten Commandments and see how many could be enforced even by Rudy Giuliani.

Our impeachment of President Clinton was another example of placing the wrong political emphasis on personal matters. We impeached Clinton for lying to the government. To our surprise the electorate gave us cold comfort. Lying to the government: It's called April 15th. And we accused Clinton of lying about sex, which all men spend their lives doing, starting at 15 bragging about things we haven't done yet, then on to fibbing about things we are doing, and winding up with prevarications about things we no longer can do.

When the Monica Lewinsky news broke, my wife set me straight about the issue. "Here," she said, "is the most powerful man in the world. And everyone hates his wife. What's the matter with Sharon Stone? Instead, he's hit-

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ting on an emotionally disturbed intern barely out of her teens." But our horn rims were so fogged with detestation of Clinton that we couldn't see how really detestable he was. If we had stayed our hand in the House of Representatives and treated the brute with shunning or calls for interventions to make him seek help, we might have chased him out of the White House. (Although this probably would have required a U.S. news media from a parallel universe.)

Such things as letting the abortion debate be turned against us and using the gravity of the impeachment process on something that required the fly-swat of pest control were strategic errors. Would that blame could be put on our strategies instead of ourselves. We have lived up to no principle of conservatism.

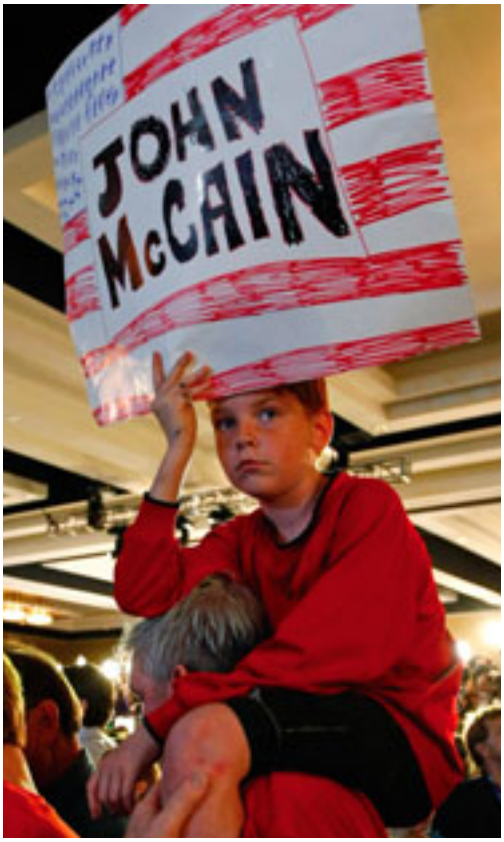
Government is bigger than ever. We have fattened the stalled ox and hatred therewith rather than dined on herbs where love (and the voter) is. Instead of flattening the Department of Education with a wrecking ball we let it stand as a pulpit for Bill Bennett. When—to switch metaphors yet again—such a white elephant is not discarded someone will eventually try to ride in the howdah on its back. One of our supposed own did. No Child Left Behind? What if they deserve to be left behind? What if they deserve a smack on the behind? A nationwide program to test whether kids are what? Stupid? You've got kids. Kids are stupid.

We railed at welfare and counted it a great victory when Bill Clinton confused a few poor people by making the rules more complicated. But the "French-bread lines" for the rich, the "terrapin soup kitchens," continue their charity without stint.

The sludge and dreck of political muck-funds flowing to prosperous businesses and individuals have gotten deeper and more slippery and stink worse than ever with conservatives minding the sewage works of legislation.

Agriculture is a business that has been up to its bib overalls in politics since the first Thanksgiving dinner kickback to the Indians for subsidizing Pilgrim maize production with fish head fertilizer grants. But never, since the *Mayflower* knocked the rock in Plymouth, has anything as putrid as the Farm, Nutrition and Bioenergy Act of 2008 been spread upon the land. Just the name says it. There are no farms left. Not like the one grampa grew up on.

A "farm" today means 100,000 chickens in a space the size of a Motel 6 shower stall. If we cared anything about "nutrition" we would—to judge by the mountainous, jiggling flab of Americans—stop growing all food immediately. And "bioenergy" is a fraud of John Edwards-marital-fidelity proportions. Taxpayer money composted to produce a fuel made of alcohol that is more expensive than oil, more polluting than oil, and almost as bad as oil with vermouth and an olive. But this bill passed with bipartisan majorities in both houses of Congress and was happily signed into law by President Bush. Now it's going to cost us at least $285 billion. That's about five times the gross domestic product of prewar Iraq. For what we will spend on the Farm, Nutrition and Bioenergy Act of 2008 we could have avoided the war in Iraq and simply bought a controlling interest in Saddam Hussein's country.



Present at the concession

REUTERS

Yes, we got a few tax breaks during the regimes of Reagan and W. But the government is still taking a third of our salary. Is the government doing a third of our job? Is the government doing a third of our dishes? Our laundry? Our vacuuming? When we go to Hooters is the government tending bar making sure that one out of three margaritas is on the house? If our spouse is feeling romantic and we're tired, does the government come over to our house and take care of foreplay? (Actually, during the Clinton administration . . .)

Anyway, a low tax rate is not—never mind the rhetoric of every conservative politician—a bedrock principle of conservatism. The principle is fiscal responsibility.

Conservatives should never say to voters, "We can lower your taxes." Conservatives should say to voters, "You can raise spending. You, the electorate, can, if you choose, have an infinite number of elaborate and expensive government programs. But we, the government, will have to pay for those programs. We have three ways to pay.

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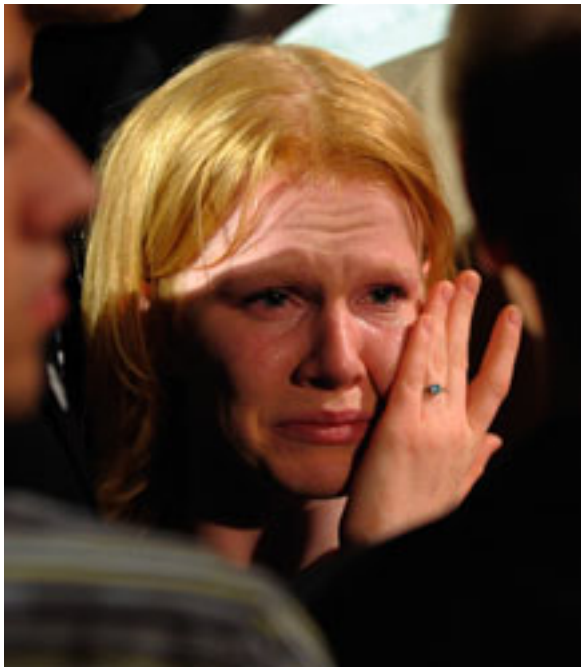
"We can inflate the currency, destroying your ability to plan for the future, wrecking the nation's culture of thrift and common sense, and giving free rein to scallywags to borrow money for worthless scams and pay it back 10 cents on the dollar.

"We can raise taxes. If the taxes are levied across the board, money will be taken from everyone's pocket, the economy will stagnate, and the poorest and least advantaged will be harmed the most. If the taxes are levied only on the wealthy, money will be taken from wealthy people's pockets, hampering their capacity to make loans and investments, the economy will stagnate, and the poorest and the least advantaged will be harmed the most.

"And we can borrow, building up a massive national debt. This will cause all of the above things to happen plus it will fund Red Chinese nuclear submarines that will be popping up in San Francisco Bay to get some decent Szechwan take-out."

Yes, this would make for longer and less pithy stump speeches. But we'd be showing ourselves to be men and women of principle. It might cost us, short-term. We might get knocked down for not whoring after bioenergy votes in the Iowa caucuses. But at least we wouldn't land on our scruples. And we could get up again with dignity intact, dust ourselves off, and take another punch at the liberal bully-boys who want to snatch the citizenry's freedom and tuck that freedom, like a trophy feather, into the hatbands of their greasy political bowlers.



Tears for McCain

But are we men and women of principle? And I don't mean in the matter of tricky and private concerns like gay marriage. Civil marriage is an issue of contract law. A constitutional amendment against gay marriage? I don't get it. How about a constitutional amendment against *first* marriages? Now we're talking. No, I speak, once again, of the geological foundations of conservatism.

Where was the *meum* and the *tuum* in our shakedown of Washington lobbyists? It took a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives 40 years—from 1954 to 1994—to get that corrupt and arrogant. And we managed it in just 12. (Who says Republicans don't have much on the ball?)

Our attitude toward immigration has been repulsive. Are we not pro-life? Are not immigrants alive? Unfortunately, no, a lot of them aren't after attempting to cross our borders. Conservative immigration policies are as stupid as conservative attitudes are gross. Fence the border and give a huge boost to the Mexican ladder industry. Put the National Guard on the Rio Grande and know that U.S. troops are standing between you and yard care. George W. Bush, at his most beneficent, said if illegal immigrants wanted citizenship they would have to do three things: Pay taxes, learn English, and work in a meaningful job. *Bush* doesn't meet two out of three of those qualifications. And where would you rather eat? At a Vietnamese restaurant? Or in the Ayn Rand Café? Hey, waiter, are the burgers any good? Atlas shrugged. (We would, however, be able to have a smoke at the latter establishment.)

To go from slime to the sublime, there are the lofty issues about which we never bothered to form enough principles to go out and break them. What is the coherent modern conservative foreign policy?

We may think of this as a post 9/11 problem, but it's been with us all along. What was Reagan thinking, landing Marines in Lebanon to prop up the government of a country that didn't have one? In 1984, I visited the site where the Marines were murdered. It was a beachfront bivouac overlooked on three sides by hills full of hostile Shiite militia. You'd urge your daughter to date Rosie O'Donnell before you'd put troops ashore in such a place.

Since the early 1980s I've been present at the conception (to use the polite term) of many of our foreign policy initiatives. Iran-contra was about as smart as using the U.S. Postal Service to get weapons to anti-Communists. And I notice Danny Ortega is back in power anyway. I had a look into the eyes of the future rulers of Afghanistan at a *sura* in Peshawar as the Soviets were withdrawing from Kabul. I would rather have had a beer with Leonid Brezhnev.

Fall of the Berlin wall? Being there was fun. Nations that flaked off of the Soviet Union in southeastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus? Being there was not so fun.

The aftermath of the Gulf war still makes me sick. Fine to save the fat, greedy Kuwaitis and the arrogant, grasping house of Saud, but to hell with the Shiites and Kurds of Iraq until they get some oil.

NEWSCOM

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Then, half a generation later, when we returned with our armies, we expected to be greeted as liberators. And, damn it, we were. I was in Baghdad in April 2003. People were glad to see us, until they noticed that we'd forgotten to bring along any personnel or provisions to feed or doctor the survivors of shock and awe or to get their electricity and water running again. After that they got huffy and began stuffing dynamite down their pants before consulting with the occupying forces.

Is there a moral dimension to foreign policy in our political philosophy? Or do we just exist to help the world's rich people make and keep their money? (And a fine job we've been doing of *that* lately.)

If we do have morals, where were they while Bosnians were slaughtered? And where were we while Clinton dithered over the massacres in Kosovo and decided, at last, to send the Serbs a message: Mess with the United States and we'll wait six months, then bomb the country next to you. Of Rwanda, I cannot bear to think, let alone jest.

And now, to glue and screw the lid on our coffin, comes this financial crisis. For almost three decades we've been trying to teach average Americans to act like "stakeholders" in their economy. They learned. They're crying and whining for government bailouts just like the billionaire stakeholders in banks and investment houses. Aid, I can assure you, will be forthcoming from President Obama.

Then average Americans will learn the wisdom of Ronald Reagan's statement: "The ten most dangerous words in the English language are, 'I'm from the federal government, and I'm here to help.'" Ask a Katrina survivor.

The left has no idea what's going on in the financial crisis. And I honor their confusion. Jim Jerk down the road from me, with all the cars up on blocks in his front yard, falls behind in his mortgage payments, and the economy of Iceland implodes. I'm missing a few pieces of this puzzle myself.

Under constant political pressure, which went almost unresisted by conservatives, a lot of lousy mortgages that would never be repaid were handed out to Jim Jerk and his drinking buddies and all the ex-wives and single mothers with whom Jim and his pals have littered the nation.

Wall Street looked at the worthless paper and thought, "How can we make a buck off this?" The answer was to wrap it in a bow. Take a wide enough variety of lousy mortgages—some from the East, some from the West, some from the cities, some from the suburbs, some from shacks, some from McMansions—bundle them together and put pressure on the bond rating agencies to do fancy risk management math, and you get a "collateralized debt obligation" with a triple-A rating. Good as cash. Until it wasn't.

Or, put another way, Wall Street was pulling the "room full of horse s—" trick. Brokerages were saying, "We're going to sell you a room full of horse s—. And with that much horse s—, you just *know* there's a pony in there somewhere."

People were glad to see us in Baghdad until they noticed that we'd failed to make provision to feed or doctor the survivors of shock and awe or to get their electricity and water running. After that they got huffy and began stuffing dynamite down their pants.

Anyway, it's no use blaming Wall Street. Blaming Wall Street for being greedy is like scolding defensive linemen for being big and aggressive. The people on Wall Street never claimed to be public servants. They took no oath of office. They're in it for the money. We pay them to be in it for the money. We don't want our retirement accounts to get a 2 percent return. (Although that sounds pretty good at the moment.)

What will destroy our country and us is not the financial crisis but the fact that liberals think the free market is some kind of sect or cult, which conservatives have asked Americans to take on faith. That's not what the free market is. The free market is just a measurement, a device to tell us what people are willing to pay for any given thing at any given moment. The free market is a bathroom scale. You may hate what you see when you step on the scale. "Jeeze, 230 pounds!" But you can't pass a law making yourself weigh 185. Liberals think you can. And voters—all the voters, right up to the tippy-top corner office of Goldman Sachs—think so too.

We, the conservatives, who *do* understand the free market, had the responsibility to—as it were—foreclose upon this mess. The market is a measurement, but that measuring does not work to the advantage of a nation or its citizens unless the assessments of volume, circumference, and weight are conducted with transparency and under the rule of law. We've had the rule of law largely in our hands since 1980. Where is the transparency? It's one more job we botched.

Although I must say we're doing good work on our final task—attaching the garden hose to our car's exhaust pipe and running it in through a vent window. Barack and Michelle will be by in a moment with some subsidized ethanol to top up our gas tank. And then we can turn the key. ♦

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Apathetics Anonymous

The joy of deciding not to decide who should be the next president of the United States

By Matt Labash

A strange thing happened to me this election cycle. After examining my conscience, determining that I did indeed have one, I decided not to cast a vote for president. I informed my inner circle, who immediately attacked. I was called an idiot, an irresponsible citizen, and less than a man. Even worse, I was accused of being that dimmest of characters: an undecided voter, possibly from Ohio. This is the kind of slander that could cause me to slug someone. But I cut my mother slack since she's become more opinionated with age (and accounts will soon be squared when she is prematurely checked into a home).

As someone who holds the heretical belief that presidential elections matter less than we give them credit for, I've always thought it would be useful to start an apathy support group. Of course, I probably wouldn't care enough to show up and lead the group, if anyone else cared enough to join. The "a" word has become a dirty one in our society, though the Stoics saw it merely as "the extinction of the passions by the ascendancy of reason." Medical literature suggests that apathy can in fact be caused by seeing something horrific, such as wartime conditions, health traumas, or watching Tito the Builder campaign for John McCain.

But of course, apathy is not always what causes people to become nonvoters. I was not unengaged or undecided, but, rather, made a very conscious decision that I wasn't buying what either candidate was selling. I could've perhaps supported Barack Obama's call to serve a cause larger than myself, if after two years of discharging gassy effluvia, he'd successfully named a cause larger than himself. As a lifelong conservative, I bristle at all the talk of hope and change, which dashes my hopes that this change they speak of won't require more of my tax dollars than they'd hoped.

My disillusionment with Republicans is even more complete. Out of disgust, I'd refrained from voting for George W. Bush in 2004, instead writing in my former brother-in-law, who was running a doomed campaign for county commissioner at the time. It seemed like he could use a fallback position.

Four years later, it felt even less advisable to reward Republicans after any number of crimes against ethics and judgment. While I like McCain the person, much as I do Obama, I couldn't shake the feeling that he was making it up as he went along, from his advocacy of nationalizing bad mortgages to picking Sarah Palin as a running mate. If I thought the qualities that recommended a vice-presidential candidate were lack of experience, an addiction to relentlessly cloying populist rhetoric, and a slim girlish figure, I'd have just voted for Kerry-Edwards in 2004.

In this age, however, making up your mind to not make up your mind can leave you feeling like a moral pygmy, what with all the voteaholic self-righteousness that is peddled ad nauseam. These voting-advocacy groups descend like swarms of locusts every four years, insisting on how important voting for the sake of voting is. You know the ones. They Rock the Vote, Rush the Vote, Promote the Vote, Whisper Sweet Nothings in the Vote's Ear, Tell the Vote She Looks Pretty, and Ask the Vote if She'd Like To Go Out for One Strawberry Malt with Two Straws.

Being for the process of voting, of course, allows celebrity spokes-tools to offer us all the self-congratulatory harangues they so enjoy delivering, without their having to delve into the knotty complexities of, say, Saving Darfur or Freeing Tibet. The simple act of shuffling off to your local middle school to hit a touchscreen for your candidate, in their telling, becomes a feat of civic heroism. When in fact it requires about as much sacrifice and good citizenship as returning library books on time.

The apex of such vacuity came last cycle during the "Vote or Die" campaign. It left me hopeful that the vote-

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aholic community would suffer a permanent setback when it was revealed that P. Diddy, the campaign's brain if that's not too strong a word, had himself failed to both vote and die. But no such luck.

This cycle saw a new low when I was sent an email by the Hip Hop Caucus shortly before the election. They encouraged me to watch streaming video of the rapper T.I. voting as part of their "Respect My Vote" campaign. This was a notable accomplishment for T.I., it turns out, since, though he'd been lecturing all the young people to vote, he couldn't himself on account of being a convicted felon.

Resourceful citizen that he is, T.I. found a loophole in Georgia law. As he tells it, "As long as you registered, you ain't servin' no sentence, you are awaiting sentencing, as of right now, you can vote." And so he did. "I'm actually leading by example," he proclaimed afterwards. A grateful nation thanks him. But perhaps, while T.I. is giving himself a gold star for voting, he might consider that he'd have more usefully checked off his good citizenship block by not getting busted for possessing unregistered machine guns with silencers, by not selling crack, and by not getting into public beefs with fellow citizens Lil' Flip, Chaka Zulu, and Shawty Lo.

It's not just felonious rappers, however, who are infantilizing the act of voting. Corporations, too, are getting in on the action. As MSNBC.com reported, voting has become so sacrosanct that businesses are actually giving away free stuff just for your having done so.

If you showed up with your "I voted" sticker this election day—a boast that has the ring of a 6-year-old crowing that he successfully tied his shoes—it was possible to get free ice cream from Ben & Jerry's, free donuts from Krispy Kreme, and free marital aids—a "Maverick sleeve" for men ("he's always there to lend a hand, he works for every man, and he bucks the status quo") or a Silver Bullet mini-vibrator for women ("a great stress reliever during these economic times")—from the sex-toys emporium Babeland.

I hate to rain on the voteaholic's good-feelings parade, but as an engaged citizen, I must. First, there's the illogic of encouraging people to vote who might not believe in what you do. When I think a particular presidential candidate really matters, as I often have, the last thing in the world I want to do is to encourage someone who opposes that candidate to vote. I'm happy for you if your voice has found expression. But there's only one voice I want to count: my own. The last thing I need is your cancelling it out. Suggesting that the latter is more important than the former is suggesting that the act of voting is more important than what

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you're voting for, which puts a question mark on the seriousness of the entire enterprise.

But we kid ourselves that our individual votes matter more than they do. As author Steven Landsburg wrote in *Slate*, even assuming you lived in Florida during a tight election, one in which 51 percent of fellow voters had a likelihood of voting for a particular candidate, your chance of casting the tiebreaker would be one in 10 to the 1,046th power, "approximately the same chance you have of winning the Powerball jackpot 128 times in a row." Shooting down the voteaholic's standard objection—what if everyone thought like that?—Landsburg wrote, "So what? Everyone *doesn't* think like that. They continue to vote by the millions and tens of millions."

And the large groups of people who do think like that would have had a negligible effect on the election if they'd chosen otherwise. After the 2000 election—the tightest in modern history—Northwestern University researchers, along with the Campaign Study Group, set about studying nonvoters and found that if they had gone ahead and voted, 37 percent would have voted for Bush, and 37 percent would have voted for Al Gore, leaving us right where we finished anyway.

After the 2000 election—the tightest in modern history—researchers studied nonvoters and found that if they had gone ahead and voted, 37 percent would have voted for Bush, and 37 percent would have voted for Gore, leaving us right back where we finished.

Voteaholics also eternally assume that high voter turnout is a sign of the good health of our system, when in fact, the opposite could be argued. Do more people vote because they're satisfied or because they're dissatisfied? A look at figures kept by the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) might cause you to question this article of faith.

IDEA, it turns out, keeps statistics on voter turnout for all countries that have had elections since 1945. America, which most would agree is the prime exemplar of democracy, the envy of the world, averages a meager 48.3 percent voter turnout, enough to get us ranked 139th. Who's ahead of us? Such shiny happy beacons of freedom as Cambodia, Indonesia, Angola, and Somalia (all ranked in the top ten with more than 85 percent turnout), as well as Rwanda, Iran, Zimbabwe, Syria, Russia, and Uganda in descending order, to name just a few. We beat Sierra Leone at least, if only by a point-and-a-half.

I'm not disparaging voting, just saying that it's grossly overrated. I voted this year, just not for president. On Election Day, I woke up early for a journalist (9 A.M.), made my way down to the polling place in the rain like all the other heroes, and said hello to my friends in the Republican tent in the parking lot, who were passing out donuts and literature. I caught the eye of a high school buddy's mother, who seemed happy enough to see me, until I informed her of my vote for president: none of the above.

"Go home," she commanded.

"That's okay," interrupted a freshly scrubbed baby-faced stranger in a suit, named Matt Swanson, who was running for the Board of Education. "Just as long as you vote for me," he said, handing me a flyer.

At the Democratic table (more literature, more donuts), a stubbled union member shook his head in disgust when I broke the same news. "If you don't vote, you can't complain," he said sternly, repeating the common sophism that makes about as much sense as saying that you can't stay sober if you won't get drunk. "Don't worry," I tell him, "it didn't stop me last time." When it comes to dispensing blame, I'm a committed redistributionist.

Inside, I stood in front of the touchscreen and voted my conscience. "Yes" for Matt Swanson, since we've got history. "Yes" for Slots for Tots, a Maryland ballot measure which will fill state coffers with gambling money from newly installed slot machines, money which will pay for teachers and schools and, more important, be a hedge against my state taxes' getting hiked further to hell.

As for president, I left my ballot beautifully, gloriously blank. No vote is a vote too, as the libertarian kids like to say. In my case, a vote of no-confidence in the available candidates is simultaneously a vote of confidence in the stability of our system to withstand the whims of any individual. I felt so good about my nondecision that, wearing my "I Voted" sticker at Starbucks afterwards, where I'd come to get my free tall Pike Place Roast, I tried to cadge a piece of blueberry crumb cake as well. "You're on your own in 2012," my shotgun-riding wife said.

So no need for me to congratulate you on voting. As you sit there with your free Krispy Kremes, Starbucks Thanksgiving Blends, and Silver Bullet vibrators, everyone from T.I. to Diddy already has. Instead, I'd like to leave you with a thought, something voteaholics don't treasure as much as a free cup of Ben & Jerry's. They are the words of the 17th-century English politician Lord Falkland: "When it is not necessary to make a decision, it is necessary not to make a decision." ♦

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Mr. and Mrs. V.S. Naipaul and the Nobel Prize, 2001

AP PHOTO / PRESSENS BILD / JONAS EKSTRÖMER

Sir Vidia's Dance

Can life and art be separated?

BY JOSEPH BOTTUM

During a brief remission in his wife's cancer, the Nobel Prize-winning novelist V.S. Naipaul casually explained to a journalist that he had always been "a great prostitute man," mongering among the whores from the early days of his marriage.

The publicity that followed from the remark "consumed" his wife, he later admitted to his biographer, Patrick French. "She had all the relapses and everything after that. She suffered. It could be said that I killed her. . . . I feel a little bit that way." Unfortunately, he didn't feel "that way" enough to think it inappropriate to move into his house, the day after he cremated his wife, his new mistress, a Pakistani journalist he'd just met (and would, in short order, marry).

Even before the whoring revelations, Naipaul's first wife, a middle-class woman named Patricia Hale whom he'd met while he was a student on scholarship to England, had known about a prior mistress—but only because Naipaul himself decided one day to tell her, explaining the violent acts he enjoyed with the woman, some of them memorialized in photographs he brought along to aid the explanation.

The woman's name was Margaret Gooding, and Naipaul met her in 1972 in Buenos Aires. French's new biography of Naipaul, *The World Is What It Is*, quotes extensively from her letters: unbearable scrawls that read like clinical case studies drawn from the pages of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. She begs, moans, despairs, and pleads for Naipaul's "cruel sexual desires." She calls him her "god," her "black master." Her multiple abortions of his children sicken her, but she offers them up to him as proof of her love and abasement.

The World Is What It Is
The Authorized Biography of V.S. Naipaul
by Patrick French
Knopf, 576 pp., $30

And all this sex stuff is only the beginning. Throughout *The World Is What It Is* Naipaul shows himself arrogant beyond belief, and vile-tempered, and as self-obsessed as a man simpering while he looks at himself in the mirror. His letters and conversation are full of references to "niggers" and dismissals of Africans and dark-skinned Indians.

The man was capable of bouts of extraordinary cruelty: Unhappy with Margaret at one point, Naipaul explains, "I was very violent with her for two days. . . . Her face was bad. She couldn't appear really in public. My hand was swollen." But then, he was capable of ordinary, everyday cruelty, as well: "You are the only woman I know who has no skill," his wife's diaries reveal Naipaul once told her, just in passing. "You behave like the wife of a clerk who has risen above her station." He moved on to the mistress who would become his second wife because his inamorata Margaret had

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simply grown unworthy of his use: "middle-aged, almost an old lady."

Vile stuff. I didn't need to know all this about Naipaul. I didn't want to know all this about the man. But the weird thing is that Naipaul himself wants us to know all this. The subtitle makes that clear enough: "The Authorized Biography of V.S. Naipaul." The novelist turned over his papers to French and sat for interview after interview, apparently hiding nothing—all in the course of authorizing this account of his life.

The book appeared in Britain last spring, around the time of the American publication of *A Writer's People*, Naipaul's own text, a kind of literary autobiography or account of his mind as formed by his reading. "Grandiloquence has always been the Achilles' heel of Naipaul's writing," the reviewer David Rieff once remarked, and grandiloquent the book certainly is—besides revealing that Naipaul's mind is nearly as unpleasant as his life.

"It is amazing to me," he writes, "how often I was baffled by famous novels of the time." In *A Writer's People* he dismisses Graham Greene as someone incapable of making "his subject clear," Philip Larkin as a "minor poet," and Derek Walcott as a failure "rescued by the American universities." No book escapes his scorn as unworthy of his reading, and no country—from the Trinidad in which he was born, to the India from which his parents came, to the England in which he settled—escapes his scorn as a land unworthy of his residence.

Together, *A Writer's People* and *The World Is What It Is* make as disturbing a picture as we've had of an author since the biographies of that odd little neurotic Algernon Charles Swinburne (another escapee from the pages of Sacher-Masoch) came out after his death in 1909. And the question, of course, is why V.S. Naipaul wants us—needs us—to know all these ugly details of his sordid life and disagreeable mind.

Perhaps there's some master plan behind it all, some half-baked notion in which Naipaul imagines that future generations will see him as a heroic refuser of hypocrisy. He's always been a sadist and a smell-smock and a coxcomb, and he's always enjoyed it. So why should he act the man of prissy virtues after he's gained all the rewards that a successful highbrow writing life can possibly bring? He has the Nobel Prize, after all, together with a knighthood and more money than he can spend. His interests now lie only in making sure that readers a hundred years from now will find him interesting. And thus he places a bet that prurience will never go out of fashion and that all the tabloid titillation will keep his name alive.

Or perhaps it's all some badly chosen jujitsu, some over-thought idea that if he gets the news out in the open now, the revulsion will be out of the way all the sooner. There's a strange rule of literature, by which every literary reputation goes into decline in the first years after an author's death; the writers who assume a permanent place in the canon are the ones who manage to bounce back from death's decline.

Sure, the effect of all these revelations is to wreck Naipaul's reputation for the current generation, but then, he is 76 years old and needn't put up with the denunciations for very long. The stories of his loathsome behavior were bound to come out eventually—nobody of his stature escapes tell-all biographies—and if he can get the news out now, his reputation might begin its rebound in time to keep him in the canon of English literature.

In Britain, the typical explanation has been some combination of arrogance and insecurity. The truth is that Naipaul's books never sold particularly well. He grew fat, instead, on literary institutions: the prizes, the lectureships, the grants, the scholarships, the artist-in-residence programs. What all that bred in him was, in part, an overweening self-assurance—the cause both of his behavior and his belief that he was above the consequences of our knowing about that behavior.

And yet, all that highbrow esteem also left him with enormous uncertainty about his place in the world. His treatment of his wife is the most obvious example of his general despising of all who admired him. He wanted more, and the simple fact is that Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul just didn't feel he was famous enough. Better that average people know something bad about him than that they know nothing at all. If you're desperate enough, fame is grasped wherever one can find it.

The more I've thought about it, however, the more I've come to think that the truth includes all of these explanations—and something more. Both his anxious egotism and his hunger for future reputation may have led Naipaul to create, from the raw material of his life, one last literary construction. He's making a character out of it, and he's telling a final story.

Here's the arrogance: It's a grand literary joke on all his readers, for we gave Naipaul our admiration, and he turns out to have been someone we wouldn't have touched with a barge pole. And here's the insecurity: He authorized Patrick French's biography in a desperate concluding bid to make himself memorable by turning his life into something with the shape of a novel.

Unfortunately, this novelistic life injures the actual novels from which we get any desire to remember the man. Surely he sees that, after having all this forced down our throats, we can no longer read *A Bend in the River* or *A House for Mr. Biswas* in the way we used to? Surely he understands that his semi-autobiographical stories—*The Enigma of Arrival*, for instance, and *Miguel Street*—are now ruined for us? Surely he knows that it has become much harder to laugh at the jokes in such comic works as *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira*?

Perhaps, in some abstract sense, a novel is an independent thing, with the person who wrote it utterly beside the point. But in the real world of reading, when we know certain facts about a writer, we read them into the story and find them buried there. Books are responsible for their authors; in a kind of child labor, they carry their fathers on their backs. And the works of V.S. Naipaul are now so weighted down they feel like blocks of lead. ♦

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Physical Man

Is science the alternative to philosophy and art?

BY RYAN T. ANDERSON

It's a familiar comic scene. A man is searching for something under a street lamp. A passerby approaches:

"What are you looking for?"

"My keys."

"Where did you lose them?"

"Back over there."

"Then why look for them here?"

"The light is better here."

Academic experts—economists, lawyers, philosophers, theologians—often seem to have the same attitude: Whatever you need you can find in their corner, where all the light is. Supply and demand, legal regulation, the Categorical Imperative, Original Sin can explain everything. Perhaps no discipline is more likely to claim explanatory omnipotence and unique objectivity than science. Before the altar of science, all other disciplines must bow. And its high priests are evolutionary biologists and neuroscientists: Everything about us, ultimately, can be explained by natural selection and the brain.

Am I being unfair? Only a bit. For an exemplar of this attitude, take Michael S. Gazzaniga's new book, *Human: The Science Behind What Makes Us Unique*. Don't let the subtitle fool you; it's not as if "science" is one among many branches of knowledge that shed light on what distinguishes us. No, Gazzaniga thinks that we can put away philosophical inquiry, poetic rumination, and prophetic revelation: Recent advances in neuroscience are finally providing us with what Gazzaniga regards as *real* answers to life's deepest questions, which (like everything human) are ultimately, he is absolutely sure, about biology.

Human
The Science Behind What Makes Us Unique
by Michael S. Gazzaniga
Ecco, 464 pp., $27.50

In reality, Gazzaniga and his colleagues overreach and under-deliver. This is not to deny that science is making amazing discoveries about human nature, and for understanding some of these, this book is quite helpful.

Director of the SAGE Center for the Study of the Mind at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and a member of the President's Council on Bioethics, Gazzaniga is an authority on neuroscience, especially split-brain research. In *Human* he offers a useful one-stop shop on the latest scientific findings, even if his endless name-dropping and hedging of claims with conflicting theories make for a cumbersome read and leave some of his own conclusions elusive. Trying, too, is his overly conversational style: "How can one little change do so much damage? Take a deep breath. Blow it out slowly. OK, now you're ready." With proper editing, the text could have been half as long as it is.

Gazzaniga's main aim is simple: to show how human beings can be "hugely different" from other animals despite having "all of these connections with the biologic world, and . . . in some instances similar mental structures." The differences are the result of many small brain developments eventually reaching a biological tipping point, what Gazzaniga calls "a phase shift." After a tour of our brain's hemispheres and lobes, cerebral cortex and neocortex, cerebellum and corpus callosum, Gazzaniga concludes that "the human brain is a bizarre device, set in place through natural selection for one main purpose—to make decisions that enhance reproductive success."

He similarly explains human practices like the arts, noting that we alone make music as such. "It boils down to this: . . . Sensations and perceptions that have adaptive value . . . often become aesthetically preferred." Admitting (because scientific research confirms) that "art can put a smile on your face," Gazzaniga lets us in on the secret: We are smiling "because our cocky brain is pleased with itself, because it is fluently processing a stimulus, but you don't need to tell the artist that."

For a study of human-to-human social interactions, he turns to evolutionary psychology, according to which social relationships "are merely by-products of behavior originally selected to avoid our being eaten by predators." We may distinguish "our 'meaningful' as well as our 'manipulative' social relationships," but he considers this a mere rationalization "generated by a process secondary to the real reason we fall into social groups." Our sociability is "deeply rooted in our biology not simply in our cognitive theories about ourselves." So too, in his view, are those very cognitive theories, and even cognition itself.

So it isn't surprising that Gazzaniga also uses biology to explain "the moral compass within." Where does our morality come from? While we might "like to think of ourselves as rational beings" able to reach timeless, objective moral truths, Gazzaniga argues that it is "our gut, our intuitive self, that first comes up with the judgment, and our rational self afterward tries to come up with the reasons" to justify prerational moral intuition.

Where do these gut intuitions come from? Although "until recently, all one could do was bat these ideas around without any concrete evidence," now "things have changed" and modern science shows that "we actually have hardwired ethical programming that has been selected for." You guessed it: Morality, like everything else, has been selected for its survival value.

Consequently, the incest taboo needs amendment. This gut instinct has been selected only because, on average, in

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the long run, it leads to reproductive success. But "if it were rational, then it would not apply to adopted or to stepsiblings." Gazzaniga, in technical terms, explains where this moral belief comes from: "We got it at the factory." He confidently concludes that "moral judgments are not completely rational," they amount to little more than "It feels bad: don't do it."

In fact, all kinds of moral norms lack a rational basis: "Why not dump your sick husband or wife and get a healthy one? That would be more rational. Why spend public money on the severely handicapped, when they will rarely be able to repay it?" In Gazzaniga's world, "a rational person would never go into partnership with someone else because of the high probability that the other rational person would cheat, because if the opportunity presented itself, there would be no rational reason not to."

Which is why Gazzaniga is glad that we don't live in a rational world: "Emotions solve the problem" by repelling us from perfectly rational activities like cheating, lying, and extramarital sex. He appeals to the crudest form of crass utilitarianism and equates its narrow calculations of self-interest—and only these—with being "rational."

Such disregard for any sort of philosophical reflection makes *Human* a disappointment. While Gazzaniga is a reliable guide on the facts of neuroscience and evolutionary psychology, his interpretations of the data and hasty dismissals of other disciplines of inquiry (especially philosophy) are fatal for the task he has set for himself: to understand humanity.

Gazzaniga's thoroughgoing physicalism, which motivates his reduction of human activities to the domain of the natural sciences alone, is unwarranted. To refute the opposing view that the human person has an immaterial aspect, he gives an evolutionary explanation for it, noting that children are "natural believers in *essentialism*." And that, presumably, is enough. If children believe something, it and all related beliefs must be evolutionarily determined and, therefore, false. We think this way only because "our brain processes have been selected over time."

But if Gazzaniga is correct about this, then his arguments are ultimately self-defeating. For if the brain's output is determined by blind evolutionary forces and has no necessary connection to objective truth, then his neuroscience is also unreliable. How does he know that the methods his brain leads

him to use produce results that are true, and not just selected for reproductive success? And, for that matter, how can I assent to Gazzaniga's conclusions? If my brain happens to organize the "chaos of input" (Gazzaniga's term) differently from his, on what basis do we settle the dispute?

In fact, if our personhood can ultimately be explained by recourse to brain states, molecules, and smaller physical parts, then what freedom is left for an "I" to engage in the weighing and sifting of argument and counterargument that makes up academic (including scientific) discourse? In explaining the science behind what makes us unique, Gazzaniga has explained away the "us." His evolutionary explanations undercut not only religion and traditional morality, but all rationality and free choice, including scientific theories and the very enterprise of conducting research to develop them.

The job for future neuroscientists is to affirm, with Gazzaniga, that the human person stands in continuity with other animals, in many respects. But also in radical discontinuity when it comes to mental life. If traditional philosophical arguments for the immateriality of the intellect are correct, then neuroscientists will need to wrestle with the possibility that our mental life is essentially immaterial, though thoroughly integrated with bodily organs like the brain.

Evolutionary psychology and neuroscience will still matter: If we're really psychosomatic unities, then our biology must be studied, as it helps provide the basis of our inclinations and intuitions and can, if dysfunctional, impede reasoning. But we must maintain that we can, by our freedom and intellect, move beyond such evolutionarily advantageous but immoral behaviors as, say, racist varieties of kin-group affinity.

"The science behind what makes us unique," as presented by Gazzaniga, is ultimately unilluminating. Gazzaniga is skilled at telling us which sections of the brain light up on the MRI machine under which circumstances, and which behaviors might have been selected to increase our reproductive potential, but he offers no guidance on what any of this means for living a human life. Should we do whatever helps our survival according to science? If not, to what standard do we appeal? And how is reasoning about these questions even possible if the mind is only the evolutionarily determined brain?

Some human phenomena simply cannot be reduced to synaptic firings. Gazzaniga explains all human phenomena in this way because that's where his training lies—and his lighting is best. But some human pursuits—for love, beauty, truth, goodness—are greater than the sum of their material processes. Rather than explain what it is to be human, Gazzaniga has explained it away.

There is light beyond the street lamp of neuroscience, and beyond is where the keys to living a fully human life can be found. ♦

CORBIS

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Listener's Choice

One phonograph, eight records, and all the time in the world.

BY JOHN SIMON

Desert Island Discs is a long-running favorite program of BBC radio, on which guests name the eight recordings that would help sustain them on a desert island. Responding to an invitation by THE WEEKLY STANDARD, I choose to omit operas because there I wouldn't know where to begin. For other music, here goes in alphabetical order.

Béla Bartók's Third Piano Concerto is one of the composer's last works, the final 17 bars orchestrated by his disciple and friend Tibor Serly. The dying Bartók composed it for his wife, the pianist Ditta Pásztory. Lacking Stravinsky's commercial shrewdness, he had little money to bestow; so this relatively easy-to-play work was his legacy to her.

I perceive the first movement, *allegretto*, as declamatory. It is brisk, bright, nearly cocky. Also, at times, lusty and provocative, it calms down for a passage wherein the orchestra predominates with festive solemnity. When the piano reassumes the lead, it gets some dizzying stuff, which the orchestra approvingly echoes. Turning ruminative, it ends with something like a modest afterthought.

The second movement, *adagio religioso*, is curious coming from a professed atheist. Slow and pensive, it exudes a tenderness that might be a farewell to his wife or to life itself. As it becomes somewhat swifter, it turns into one of Bartók's beloved "night musics," as if the composer had set his piano before an open nocturnal window, and allowed moon and stars to frolic teasingly on the keyboard.

John Simon writes about theater for Bloomberg News.

There are earthier sounds as well: night birds twittering, insects chirping, darkness yielding up its intimate secrets. Then, led by woodwinds and muted strings, the religious mode recurs, with the full orchestra finally sweeping in for a shudderingly beautiful climax abutting on silence.

The final movement, *allegro vivace*, becomes somewhat jazzy in rocking dialogue between a sprightly piano and impassioned orchestra. It ends in a tremendous affirmation, striking coming from a moribund composer; but then, "Death, where is thy sting?"

It is hard to pick a favorite among my seven recordings. Almost at random I choose Pierre Boulez and the London Symphony Orchestra with soloist Hélène Grimaud, on a Deutsche Grammophon disc that includes the other two piano concertos, marvelous in very different ways.

Gabriel Fauré is one of my favorite all-round composers, exquisitely elegant in whatever form he embraced. It's a bit of a Sophie's Choice trying to pick a single piece, but let's take the First Cello Sonata, a late work never betraying the composer's deafness, and deserving to be better known.

In its 21 or so minutes, it is a great balancing act in the Fauré manner between sentimental lyricism and fastidious restraint. The opening *allegro* proves that Fauré can sound spiky without losing his essential tunefulness. The middle movement, *andante*, is heart-stoppingly beautiful. For me, the test of true beauty in music is that it hurts, its enchantment and transience blending into a gentle ache in the heart. You wish to exclaim with Goethe's Faust, "Linger awhile, you are so fair," but it evanesces and you experience instant bliss along with intense loss.

The final movement, *allegro commodo*, dances on the cusp between merriment and reserve, "contained exuberance" Ronald Crichton calls it, reminding us that the piece was composed on the Riviera in 1917, between the anguish of wartime and the peace of the sea. Which of my three versions to recommend? The celebrated cellist Paul Tortelier, and the prematurely deceased brilliant Thomas Igloi, are equally expert. Perhaps the best sound on DG (Dabringhaus und Grimm) with Ulrich Schmid (cello) and Günter Herzfeld (piano) is to be recommended.

The Brazilian composer Mozart Camargo Guarnieri (1907-93), who wisely dropped the Mozart, was a near-contemporary of Heitor Villa-Lobos, equally gifted but far less well known abroad. Out of an abundance of Guarnieri recordings I choose a disc entitled *A Brazilian Salute* on Summit records, featuring the pianist Caio Pagano and an unnamed, presumably pickup orchestra.

It begins with the Concertino for Piano and Chamber Orchestra (1961), in Guarnieri's "nationalistic style," like much but not all of his music. The opening "Festivo," in sonata form, treats the orchestra (as Marion Verhaalen observes in her book about Guarnieri) "as one huge strumming guitar." It gives way to a "Tristonho," a type of sad song, which soon evolves into a joyous *scherzo* that, in turn, reverts to melancholy. The tripartite final movement starts with a carnivalish "Frevo" (lively, sparkling), continues with a somber "Modinha," and concludes with an "Embolada," a patter or dialogue song in rapid tempo. Yet this dizzying variety artfully coheres.

There follows another fine work, *Choros*, which designates the kind of serenade performed by bands of strolling musicians. Particularly lovely is its middle movement, well described by the booklet as "an ardent, nostalgic, and serene love song." I also cherish the last movement's outbursts of humorous verve. The CD ends with brief piano pieces, preludes Guarnieri calls penteios, which dazzle with their terse penetration.

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Jacques Ibert's daughter Jacqueline was a harpist, and prevailed on her father to write the wonderful Trio for Violin, Cello, and Harp (1944). Such a lovely, peaceful piece amid World War II is, in itself, remarkable. So, too, was Jacqueline's willingness to bribe her father by ceding her wartime cigarette ration to him, considering how passionately the French smoke. In my recent book *John Simon on Music* I called the result "one of the most beautiful chamber works ever written."

The first movement is all Gallic sophistication gracefully rendered; the third movement, cracklingly jovial energy. But the middle movement, *andante sostenuto*, is a marvel: the personification of longing for an absent lover or elusive happiness. In some five minutes the gamut of human yearning, from intensive to resigned, is perfectly captured down to the last dying fall.

Of the three versions I have, the one by the Ensemble Arpeggione on Adda records (it includes good stuff by Albert Roussel and Darius Milhaud) may be the best. But the one on REM, in *Jacques Ibert: Musique concertante*, is also very good. Only the version that is part of Olympia's two-disc *Complete Chamber Music* loses a bit by slightly minimizing the harp.

Next come the often recorded string quartets of Leos Janácek. According to Janácek's great compatriot, the novelist Milan Kundera, the composer's music is "harsh juxtapositions instead of transitions, repetition instead of variation, and always heads straight for the heart of things: only the note that says something essential has the right to exist." But which note is that? I would say the one that takes us by surprise, yet feels absolutely right.

The First Quartet, "Kreutzer Sonata," is based on Tolstoy's story about a woman unhappy in marriage and out: her lover, a foppish fiddler; her jealous husband a maltreater and eventual murderer. Elements of the story can be traced in the music, although it stands very well on its own.

Finer yet is the Second Quartet, "Intimate Letters," dedicated even more openly to Kamila Stosslova, the much younger married woman who was the unreciprocating great love of Janácek's life, his uncomprehending Muse, responsible for much of his latest and best music. This piece conveys sovereignly the trepidations and fluctuations of the composer's feelings as they hurtle between hopefulness and melancholy, fantasized fulfillment and sober awakening. It ends in triumph, anyway, and was in 1928 Janácek's last finished major work. As a British musicologist has noted, "The two quartets stand with those of Debussy, Bartók, and Ravel among the supreme masterpieces of the medium" in modern times.

Béla Bartók, 1940

Of the six versions I own, I recommend especially the Janácek Quartet on Supraphon Archiv, the Melos Quartet on Harmonia Mundi, and the Manfred Quartet on Pierre Verany discs, which incorporates the important textual emendations of Milos Skampa.

The great Catalan composer Xavier Montsalvatge (1912-2002) is another who is far too little known in this country. His numerous works in every conceivable genre are winners all, yet the only piece that gets performed now and then is the *Cancion de cuna para dormir a un negrito* ("Cradle Song for a Little Black Boy"). I pick it over several other wonderful works by Montsalvatge in my possession.

The song is part of a cycle, *Cinque canciones negras*, all five of which are noteworthy, although "Cradle Song" steals the show. The text by Ildefonso Pereda Valdes is as simple as it is sweet; the enchanting setting is as sweet as it is simple. Arguably the tenderest lullaby I know, it should lull the most recalcitrant tot to sleep with its blend of Hispanic, African, and American types of music in the Cuban manner.

My preferred version is by Isabel Bayrakdarian on the CBC record *Azulão*, with a group of cellos accompanying. By having merely a piano accompaniment, the rendition by the glorious Angelika Kirchschlager on the album *When Night Falls* (Sony) loses something. Much as I admire Joyce DiDonato, accompanied by the excellent Julius Drake, she comes across a bit too subdued. However, her album, *Pasión!*, includes all five songs of the cycle, which may make it the most desirable version.

In 1943 Sergei Prokofiev composed his Flute Sonata, one of the lightest works by this often brash and sardonic composer of largely angular music. As Opus 94 it was rewritten the following year for violin at the request of David Oistrakh, but even Oistrakh's artistry could not make the violin version as charming as the flute one.

The annotator Lorenzo Arruga has described it as "a story that seems all harmony but that is bitten with unrestrainable restlessness." Another annotator, Jérôme Pellissier, calls it close to "the Prokofiev of the great symphonies, with highly elaborate rhythms and the employment of all the harmonic attributes of the flute . . . uninhibited in its flights of virtuoso fancy."

I would add playfulness, mischievousness, and songfulness to its characteristics, with occasional turns to the wistful and sneakily sentimental. What frisky optimism in a terrible war year!

I have two versions: Bruno Cavallo (flute) and Bruno Canino (piano) on ASdisc, slower; and Jean-Pierre Rampal and Robert Veyron-Lacroix on Erato's

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two-disc *Twentieth-Century Flute Masterpieces*, faster. Most available today is the one with Emmanuel Pahud and Stephen Kovacevich on EMI, which the *Pelican Guide* pronounces "easily a first recommendation" but which I don't possess.

My eighth pick is the Fourth Symphony of the Polish master Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937) better known as Sinfonia concertante (1932). I won't try to evaluate my eight recordings of it, but for this essay I listened to the Chandos disc with Vassily Sinaisky conducting the BBC Philharmonic and Howard Shelley the piano soloist.

This three-movement symphony is really more of a piano concerto with elements of a concerto grosso about it, but beautiful by any appellation. Norman Lebrecht writes that Szymanowski, who died of tuberculosis at age 54, "has been depicted as 'the last Romantic' but his outlook was as modern as Bartók's."

The opening movement manages to be both propulsive and extremely melodious, a neat trick; the middle movement is calmly contemplative and, except for a couple of outbursts, almost sacral; the final one, strongly rhythmed again and building to two tremendous climaxes. Throughout, there is something mysterious about the work, starting with those muted drumbeats. It is also nervous, almost neurotic, which makes it peculiarly modern and megalopolitan—although embracing, as the composer said, the "savage natural and native originality" of the Polish mountain shepherds, culminating in "an almost orgiastic dance."

I would recommend getting the EMI recording of Szymanowski's breathtaking opera *King Roger*, which adds as filler the Sinfonia concertante. Simon Rattle conducts the Birmingham Philharmonic with Leif Ove Andsnes at the piano. That gives you two of the composer's masterworks in one two-disc box.

These then are my eight desert island discs, for my first shipwreck. For my next shipwreck, I already have another eight to hand. ♦

Natural Poet

Environmental lyrics are more appealing than political verse.

BY ELI LEHRER

In a land where few poets can make more than a pittance off their verse, Mary Oliver stands as a commercially successful outlier.

Although it will never show up in supermarket checkout lines, her work always tops the modern poetry best-seller lists at Amazon.com and in the trade journal *Book Sense*. And while Oliver has spent a good part of her adult life on college campuses, she never held a traditional tenure track position or earned a college degree. Indeed, for the past seven years, she's supported herself entirely through writing. In all, she has written almost 20 books and, although she's produced a textbook and innumerable essays, her output has remained largely metrical. And while she's won nearly every major award available to American poets, she's probably more popular on the high school level than in college, and more popular still with the small but active poetry-reading public.

Red Bird
by Mary Oliver
Beacon, 96 pp., $23

She has an obvious, well-deserved appeal: At her best, Mary Oliver writes genuinely good, truly accessible poetry. Most of the poems in this latest collection concern her own impressions of the natural world. And when she sticks to that topic, she ranks among the finest poets the English language has ever produced. Whether she's describing a caterpillar's transformation (*it expressed itself into the most beautiful thing*) or describing her own mystical connection to birdsong (*I listen hard / to the exuberances of / the mockingbird and the owl, / the waves and wind*)—she almost always can come up with striking, resonant images.

The surprising, active verb formulation "expressed itself"—all the more arresting on the page because it's separated from the rest of the poem with a blank line—expresses the wondrous nature of a squirmy bug's transformation into a thing of great beauty. Likewise, the juxtaposition of the birds and earth forces in that second example brings home the undeniable interconnectedness of nature.

Above all, Oliver's poetry mixes two kinds of spirituality: interest in a creator god, and an almost rapturous love for creation. This newest collection overflows with a true, honest respect for all of nature. The image of Red Bird—which pervades the collection—may sum up her view of the world better than anything. In the final poem, the "Red Bird Explains Himself," the bird speaks for itself in profound terms:

If I was the song that entered your heart
then I was the music of your heart, that
you wanted and needed,
and thus wilderness bloomed there, with
all its
followers: gardeners, lovers, people who
weep
for the death of rivers.

And this was my true task, to be the
music of the body.

This, more than anything else, outlines the essentials of Oliver's philosophy. Her odd juxtapositions of observations about lilies and ravens work just as well as her recounting of things she saw while walking. In other words, Oliver exalts a romantic—that is, emotional above all else—sense of the natural world combined with a transcendental love for the environment. God, although

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not absent, remains a formal, distant deity while the natural world and the world itself, along with the "ghosts of Emerson and Whitman" (Oliver's leading intellectual forbears), seem far more important than any heavenly spirit.

She's clearly earned her place as a poet laureate for romantic environmentalists. Oliver observes with a great sensitivity, and puts her impressions in verse in a way that few can match. She's almost never obscure but, unlike Ted Kooser—long the unofficial laureate of the environmental movement—her poetry rewards multiple, careful readings. She's a perceptive, rigorous muse of a modern environmental religion.

For those not given to romantic reverence about the natural world, some of her ideas and concepts may seem foreign. But to ignore Oliver on this basis would be to deny the beauty of the psalms to those outside the Judeo-Christian tradition, or the power of the *Bhagavad Gita* to non-Hindus. Oliver speaks plainly, carefully, and beautifully for those who place protection of the Earth above all other interests.

Beyond her observations of the natural world, however, Oliver's craft fades. True, she shows a modicum of real talent in comic verse about her dog Percy. Whether she's imagining Percy's emotional advice, or hoping that he could somehow convince the secretary of defense to end the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, she's funny and interesting if unapologetically slight.

Some other parts of *Red Bird* don't work as well. A cycle of 11 linked love poems—quite possibly a eulogy for her recently deceased life partner and literary agent, Molly Cook—overflows with genuine emotion and love but falls flat in its poetic efforts to condense and channel that emotion, sometimes resorting to crude sexualized metaphor and occasional dead moments.

One poem, "So Every Day," reads in full:

So every day
I was surrounded by the beautiful
crying forth
of the ideas of God,

one of which was you.

It's well worded—"beautiful crying forth" has a nice ring—but "So Every Day" presents little more than a passing thought that relies more on the reader than the poet to provide emotion. Even in the context of the poetic cycle, the thought she expresses never really gets finished.

And when Oliver takes on politics in a serious way, her verse becomes decidedly mediocre. One poem, "Of the Empire," stands out for its sheer loathing for a public that doesn't always share her political views:

they will say also that our politics was
no more
than an apparatus to accommodate the
feelings of
the heart, and that the heart, in those
days,
was small, and hard, and full of
meanness.

The problem isn't stinginess of spirit—poets from Chaucer onward have gotten enormous mileage out of hate—but, rather, banality. Oliver wants readers to snap into lockstep agreement with her sweeping statements rather than providing an emotional reason for doing so.

While she does well describing nature, her efforts at political poetry show a tin ear and obtuse sensibility totally out of tune with the wonderfully sensitive muse behind her other work. Luckily, Oliver or her editors seem aware of these limitations: The political poems are buried in the middle of *Red Bird*, and the stronger environmental works open and close it with vigor and force.

As with most artists, Mary Oliver's talent has its limits. But her poetry is rigorous, beautiful, well written, and offers genuine insights into the natural world. Even those who disagree with her strong views should read it. ♦

When It Sizzles

It's Fashion Week in the capital of fashion.

BY PIA CATTON

Paris

Every industry has its own language, and in the fashion crowd—especially among the retail buyers—the word "newness" is holy. Say it with your eyes closed and you can see its hiss trailing off into dollar signs. As in: "What will excite the consumer is newness," the fashion director of Bloomingdale's, Stephanie Solomon, said.

Buyers for stores around the world, like the New York-based Solomon, come to Paris in pursuit of salable innovations sparked by the runway collections. And trends do pop: All things sheer are in favor, leading to the possible return of pantyhose. After several seasons dominated by dresses, it's now time to look at separates again.

But in Paris, there is exciting newness all around. Not just on the runways, but in stores, streets, hotels, and even in the skies.

The most immediately visible trend on the sidewalks is the shape of women's pants: low-waisted and baggy at the thigh, tapered through the leg to a cropped ankle. The shape is derivative of one that was popular in the 1980s, which takes a little getting used to. But with so much room in the seat, these pants are outrageously comfortable. I know because I was excited by newness. I hope I'm still excited when I get home.

Mine came from a shop on Rue Saint-Honoré, the lively thoroughfare lined with the shops including John Galliano, Longchamp, and, *mais oui*, Brooks Brothers. Running parallel to this heavily traf-

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ficked street is a quiet fashion alley: Rue du Mont Thabor. Located near the Place Vendôme and the wildly popular Hôtel Costes, this tiny side street is emerging as a destination.

"We opened here because this street is becoming trendy," said Régis Decour, the co-owner of the custom menswear outfitter Eglé.

Trendy, yes, but Eglé emphasizes personal style. Decour and his business partner Samuel Gassmann—both 34, friendly, and laid back about how cool they are—opened the shop to introduce a younger generation of men to the pleasures of custom-made clothing. Small accessories (knit ties, cashmere scarves, woven belts) can be purchased, but the shop is lined mainly with examples of the suits, shirts, and jeans that can be made. The shop's interior—dark and warm, with updates on French traditions—is itself worth a visit.

What anchors the hip factor of this street is the multilabelboutique Maria Luisa, which sells top labels, such as Balenciaga and Nina Ricci, plus forward-looking young talents, like Lutz and Manish Arora. If you're in Paris for fashion, you will end up at Maria Luisa, if not to buy things, at least to see what's new. I've run into New York friends here, and spotted Naomi Campbell. On the sidewalk nearby I once noticed a clump of stylish people moving down the street with the intensity of an offensive line—only they were in an odd circle formation.

At the center was Mary-Kate Olsen.

About two blocks away is the Meurice Hotel, which people are talking about because its central tearoom was recently redone by Philippe Starck. Lined with mirrored panels and Corinthian columns, the room has a classic French lightness made even more sparkling with whimsical details. My perch was a Regency-style chair with black-and-white pony hide near a fossilized tree stump and one of many gold floor lamps with mirrored inlays. From low, black-velvet couches, you can admire the fabric mural on the ceiling and touch the tile floor. The decor is one of the designer's most dazzling efforts, perhaps because it is more Meurice than Starck—or maybe because a martini costs 30 euros.

But luxury need not always be gilded. Sometimes, all it takes is space to make things civilized. And that is to be found on the new airline OpenSkies, a subsidiary of British Airways that has two routes: Between New York (JFK) and Paris (Orly) and, starting this month, between New York and Amsterdam.

OpenSkies offers two categories of seating, Biz and Prem+. I flew one leg of each. Biz is designed for deep-pocketed travelers who desire space, privacy, and a *soupçon* of pampering. The rows of seating are two-by-two, but one seat faces front and the other faces the back of the plane. So you sit facing the other person in the row with you. If you don't want to see that person, a fan-shaped shade separates the seats.

The champagne flows. The seats fully recline. And the braised short ribs arrive on full-sized plates.

The seats in Prem+ are slightly narrower, but they have 51 inches of leg room and recline to 140 degrees. Both seats face the same direction. While the entertainment system is the same as in Biz, the food is more down-to-earth. There is risotto on both menus, but no *foie gras* in Prem+. Sleep came easier in Prem+ than in Biz, but I can't blame the seats. On the way over, the mind churns with all the unknowns of travel; after a week of fashion shows, visions of Chanel dance in one's head.

THE NEW YORK TIMES / REDUX

Indeed, it was at Chanel that sheer pantyhose were worn with almost every look. At Maison Martin Margiela, the thin legwear was everywhere—even on the models' heads. Is this enough to kill off the thick, opaque tights and leggings that women are wearing? Absolutely.

And you might think that, in a tough economy, dresses would be popular: You get a whole outfit in one. But as Solomon said, "We've been in a dress cycle for three seasons."

Translation: Dresses are old. In its vast and varied collection, Chanel showed a series of tweed skirts with sweaters or blouses. At Louis Vuitton, Marc Jacobs sent out silky pants, sheer blouses, and jackets with strong (sometimes peaked) shoulders—all in deep colors with a tasseled, accessorized vision of the East.

But in terms of newness, the garment that scored the highest was the jumpsuit. They were in almost every collection—and not just in Paris, but New York, too.

New, yes. But I'm not snapping them up just yet. ♦

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Grand Alliance

How Winston and the Welsh Wizard made history.

BY DAVID AIKMAN

For all of the big and small studies of various stages of Churchill's career—the early adventures in Cuba, the Northwest Frontier, and in Sudan, the heroics of the Boer prison camp escape—little has been written about the epic friendship of his political life, the one with the Liberal party giant David Lloyd George. The account of that friendship by Robert Lloyd George, great-grandson of the great man, goes far to fill the lacuna. The subtitle may overreach a little—a friendship that "changed the course of history"—but not by much.

David and Winston
How the Friendship Between Lloyd George and Winston Churchill Changed the Course of History
by Robert Lloyd George
Overlook Press, 303 pp., $29.95

For an unbroken period of 44 years, the two were close friends, sometimes rivals for power and sometimes, together, decisive partners in events of global significance: The 1914 declaration of war against Germany, the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the Norway debate in the House of Commons that brought Neville Chamberlain down and Churchill to power. When Lloyd George died in March 1945, Churchill, still prime minister, worked through the night preparing the eulogy he would deliver at the Welshman's funeral the next morning.

An unlikelier pairing for a half-century of political friendship would be hard to envisage. Lloyd George, 11 years older than Churchill, was born into humble farming circles in Wales and left school at 15. A lay preacher in his teen years in nonconformist chapels, he began his law career by defending poachers out of an office in a back room of his house. He entered parliament at 27 as a Liberal member determined to fight for the rights of the poor and disadvantaged.

Churchill, by contrast, was a grandson of the Duke of Marlborough and the son of a Tory cabinet minister. His American-born mother had a string of well placed Establishment lovers who ensured that young Winston always secured a ringside appointment as a war correspondent in the late Victorian colonial wars. But it was four years after he first entered Parliament as a Tory in 1900 that the friendship with Lloyd George began.

The Welshman—he was both the last Liberal prime minister and the only Welshman to occupy the post—joined forces with Churchill on the issue of free trade, something both men instinctively thought good for Britain and for the working man. Soon that conviction, and a growing appreciation for the Liberal social agenda, led Churchill to "cross the floor" of the House and join the Liberals. But it was Lloyd George who decisively influenced Churchill to "discover the poor," as one contemporary put it, and push through Parliament the most progressive social legislation that had ever been enacted in Great Britain: old age pensions, unemployment compensation, and other social reforms that culminated in the "People's Budget" of 1909.

During the years leading up to World War I, Churchill, as first lord of the admiralty, pushed through an expensive modernization and build-up of the Royal Navy. This briefly raised tensions with Lloyd George, who was chancellor of the exchequer and responsible for the budget. But Churchill demonstrated great loyalty to Lloyd George by defending him against charges of financial impropriety when the Marconi Company won a government contract for empire-wide wireless communications. That gesture proved invaluable after Gallipoli: Churchill was forced to resign from the cabinet, and would have remained out of office for the rest of the war but for the stubborn backing he received from Lloyd George, who became prime minister in 1916.

It was in that capacity that Lloyd George backed the decision to support Zionism with the Balfour Declaration. Churchill, instinctively supportive of the Jews, agreed, and remained committed thereafter to a Jewish state in Palestine.

Lloyd George remained prime minister until 1922, but by then he and Churchill were growing apart politically, with Lloyd George returning to his social welfare sympathies while Churchill, alarmed by the success of the Bolsheviks in Russia, hardened against anything that smacked of socialism. During the 1930s the two maintained their friendship, which all along had been reinforced by a shared sense of humor. But fittingly, the last major act of Lloyd George's political life in Parliament was a searing attack on Chamberlain in 1940 that helped to bring about Chamberlain's resignation and led to the emergence of Churchill as successor to the office Lloyd George had first held 24 years earlier. After Churchill made his first speech as prime minister—famously invoking "blood, tears, toil, and sweat"—his onetime mentor rose to reply and wish him well. Churchill heard it, weeping, his head in his hands.

Of course, the two great wartime prime ministers had much more in common than their backgrounds suggest: Both were outsiders, mavericks, rebels against tradition and conformity. They were both intellectually brilliant—though Lloyd George was the more consistent to his own political principles—and each recognized and always responded to the virtues he saw in the other. Churchill always looked upon Lloyd George as mentor, an elder brother, the leader for whom he was "the lieutenant," never referring to any other politician in this deferential way.

David and Winston makes use of both material in the public domain and materials derived from family archives, and Robert Lloyd George's account of the politics of the Britain of Edward VII

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and George V is fluent—though it might have benefited from more background analysis of the key issues affecting both the Lloyd George/Churchill friendship and the points where they seriously differed on policy.

What remains astonishing, of course, is that two such ambitious, opinionated men should have assiduously nurtured a political friendship over so many years. Such an alliance of political personalities is hardly conceivable today, when it is virtually impossible to "cross the floor" and principled political independence is almost never rewarded at the ballot box. That, of course, is our loss. Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George demonstrated how effective a carefully nurtured friendship could be over four decades in influencing the affairs of the world. ♦

The One and Only

Barack Obama won't need special effects to walk on water.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

George M. Cohan, the song-and-dance man, is invited to the Oval Office by Franklin D. Roosevelt. He is an old man, and thrilled beyond words to discover his president is a fan. FDR asks Cohan to tell him the story of his life, and thus begins *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, James Cagney's glorious 1942 musical.

The face of the actor who plays Roosevelt is obscured. We hear his voice, but he is photographed from the back, from the side, over his shoulder. The effect is to raise FDR's status to that of a divinity, the Hollywood equivalent of the Lord telling Moses: "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live . . . thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen."

I suspect the treatment of Barack Obama in Hollywood will follow along the lines of this model. Not only is Obama already a figure of worship, he easily fits an already established Hollywood model: the calm and benevolent black governmental authority figure. Over the past 20 years there has hardly been a courtroom scene in which an African American is not the wise presiding judge. Never have fictional presidents been given such glowing treatment as Morgan Freeman's in the asteroid movie *Deep Impact* and Dennis Haysbert's on the television series *24*.

But Obama is real, not fictional, and any effort to mimic or mime him, or even to offer a fictionalized representation of him in the form of a black president comparable to him, might seem disrespectful to those in Hollywood who are ready to serve him, bathe him, and anoint him with oil. He is, after all, The One, as Oprah Winfrey, perhaps the most powerful person in show business, declared him.

Among presidents in the past century, only one other—John F. Kennedy—has received such unambiguously worshipful treatment from Hollywood—and that was only after he was dead. Bill Clinton might have gotten such treatment, but as his administration began in 1993, a delegation of Hollywood potentates visited James Carville in the White House to give him their advice and counsel on what their beloved new president must do.

Their high-handed and astoundingly naïve and foolish advice on health care so enraged Carville that he began to scream at them. Carville told Maureen Dowd that "they started telling me how many degrees they had. Somebody blurted out, 'I have a Ph.D. in communications from U.C.L.A.' Well, wowee-kazowee!" This led the writer-producer Gary David Goldberg to liken his populist interlocutor to "Anthony Perkins playing Fidel Castro on acid."

Clinton's relationship with Hollywood never quite recovered from that: The injured sense among the assembled that the new young president they so wanted to love would allow them to be abused by this . . . Louisianan . . . led directly to the ambiguous portrait of Clinton offered in the film *The American President* and the television show *The West Wing*.

In the former, Clinton is a popular chief executive who is afraid to do what is right (meaning what is left) until he falls in love with an environmentalist who sets him straight. And in *The West Wing*, Aaron Sorkin took the sloppy but politically prudent Clinton, put him in a washing machine, pulled him out, and ironed him flat into the flawless and always principled Jed Bartlet.

Even if Barack Obama proves to be a disappointment to Hollywood, it simply will not have the vocabulary to translate him into something more along the lines of what they would prefer, as they did with Clinton. Expressing dissatisfaction with a black leader? That would be a betrayal of hope, of change.

The election of Obama will have one other effect on Hollywood. Once again, as was true when Clinton came to office, the evil city of coal-hearted pols will be wondrously transmuted into a sunny place populated by young, dreamy idealists who only want to make the world a better place.

There will be television series and movies about group houses filled with anorexic models playing House, Senate, and White House staffers, falling in like and in love and in sorrow, all residing within the becalmed shadow of the White House's master, who will look upon them and make it known to them that he is well pleased.

But he will never be seen. ♦

John Podhoretz, editorial director of Commentary, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*

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Parody

"President-elect Barack Obama pivoted quickly to begin filling out his new administration on Wednesday, selecting hard-charging Illinois Rep. Rahm Emanuel as White House chief of staff while aides stepped up the pace of transition work that had been cloaked in pre-election secrecy."

—Associated Press, *November 5, 2008*

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From: Dr. Kenneth Adelman <adelman@edelman.com>
Time/Date: Wednesday, November 12, 2008 9:01 AM
Subject: Re: re: temperament and judgment

Rahm (may I call you Rahm?),

Your predicament over whom to select as the next Secretary of State reminds me of when I was the director of the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (did I mention this to you already?). It was 1984 and the world was on the brink of a global thermonuclear holocaust. President Reagan turned to me and asked, "Ken, what should I

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